DERELICTS

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Part I

CHAPTER I

BEYOND THE PALE

"WARM day," said the policeman.

The man thus addressed looked up from the steps, where he was sitting bareheaded, and nodded. Then, rather quickly, he put on his hat.

"Not much Bank Holiday hereabouts."

"So much the better," said the man.

"It's all very well for them as likes it," said the policeman, wiping his forehead.

It was the first Monday in August, and his beat was not a lively one. Curiosity had attracted him toward the sitting figure, and the social instinct prompted conversation. Receiving, however, an uninterested nod in reply to his last remark, he turned away reluctantly and continued his slow tramp up the street.

The man took no notice of his departure, but, resting his chin on his hands, gazed wistfully across the road. Why he had come here to Holland Park he scarcely knew. Perhaps, in his aimless walk from his lodgings in Pimlico, he had unconsciously followed a once familiar track that had brought him to a spot filled with sweet and bitter associations.

The blinds were drawn in the great house opposite that stared white in the noonday sun. A beer-can hanging on the area railings announced the caretaker. Like most of the mansions in the long, well-kept street, it seemed abandoned to sun and silence.

It was the first time he had seen the house since the cloud had fallen upon his life. Once its interior had been as familiar to him as his own boyhood's home. Its inmates gave him flattering welcome. He was courted for his brilliant promise and admired for his good looks. A whisper of feasting and riotous living that hovered around his reputation caused him to be petted by the household as the prodigal cousin. The comforts of wealth, the charm of refinement, the warmth of affection, were his whenever he chose to knock for admittance at that door. Now he had lost them

all, as irrevocably as Adam lost Eden. He was an outcast among men. Not only had he forfeited his right to mount the steps, but he knew that the very mention of his existence in that household brought shame and fierce injunctions of silence.

He gazed at the drawn blinds of the deserted house in an agony of hopelessness, craving the warm sympathy, the laughter, the dear human companionship, the mere sound of his Christian name which he had not heard uttered for over two years — ever since he had entered by that gate above which the *lasciate ogni speranza* seemed written in letters of flame. The lines deepened on his face. The touch of a friendly hand, a kind glance from familiar eyes, the daily, unnoted possession of millions, were to him a priceless treasure, forever beyond his reach. He was barely thirty. His life was wrecked. Nothing lay before him but pariahdom, and slinking from the gaze of honest men. And within him there burnt no fiery sense of injustice to keep alive the flame of noble impulse — only self-contempt, ignominy, the ineffaceable brand of the gaol.

It was on the pavement opposite that he had been arrested. He had tripped down the

steps in evening dress, his ears buzzing with the laughter within, in spite of tremulous throbbings of his heart, and had walked into the arms of the two quiet officers in plain clothes who had been patiently awaiting his exit. From that moment onward his life had been one pain and horror. Regained freedom had brought him little joy — had brought him in fact increased despair. During the last few months of his imprisonment he had yearned sickeningly for the day of release. It had come. Sometimes he regretted the benumbed hours of that mid-time in gaol, when pain had been lost in apathy. He had been free for five months. In all probability he would be free for the rest of his life. Sometimes he shuddered at the prospect.

The policeman again passed by, and this time eyed him askance. Why was he sitting on those steps? A suspicion of felonious purpose relieved the monotony of his beat.

"You 'll be moving on soon," he said "You must n't doss on them doorsteps al day."

The man looked at him rather stupidly. His first impulse was one of servile obedience — an instinct of late habit, and he rose from

his seat. Then his sense of independence asserted itself, and he said, in a somewhat defiant tone: —

"I felt faint from the heat. You have no right to molest me."

The policeman glanced at him from head to foot. A gentleman evidently, in spite of well-worn clothes and gloveless hands thrust into trousers pockets. He wore no watch-chain, and his shirt-cuffs were destitute of links. "Down upon his luck," thought the policeman; "ill too." The man's face was pinched, and of the transparent white of a thin, fair man with delicately cut features. His eyes were heavy, deeply sunken, and wore an expression of weariness mingled with fear. The side muscles by his mouth were relaxed, as if a heavy drooping moustache had dragged them down; the scanty blonde hair on his upper lip, curled up at the ends, contrasted oddly with this impression. He looked careworn and ill. His clothes hung loosely upon him. The policeman surrendered his point.

"Well, you ain't obstructing the traffic," he replied good-humouredly; and again he left the man alone, who reseated himself on the shady steps, as if disinclined to stir from com-

fortable quarters. But the spell of his meditations had been broken. He leaned his head against the stone pillar of the balustrade and tried to think of occupation for the day. He longed for to-morrow, when he could resume his weary search for work, interrupted since Saturday noon. At first he had plunged into the hopeless task with feverish anxiety, humiliated by rebuffs, agonised through the frustration of idle hopes. Now it had grown mechanical, a daily routine, devoid of pain or joy, to drag himself through the busy streets from office to office and from shop to shop. He resented the Sunday cessation of work, as interfering with the tenor of his life. This Bank Holiday added another Sunday to the week.

The heat and glare and soundless solitude of the street made him drowsy. The thought of death passed through him: an euthanasia — to fade there peacefully out of existence. And then to be picked up dead on a doorstep — a fitting end. *Finis coronat opus.* He sniffed cynically at the idea. The minutes passed. The shade gradually encroached upon the sunlight of the pavement. A cat from one of the great deserted houses drew near with meditative step, smelt his boots, and, in the

bored manner of her tribe, curled herself up to slumber. A butcher's cart rattling past awoke the man, and he bent down and stroked the creature at his feet. Then he became aware of a figure approaching him, along the pavement — a tiny woman, neatly dressed. He watched her idly, with lack-lustre gaze. But when she came within distance of salutation, their eyes met, and each started in recognition. He rose hurriedly and made a step as if to cross the road, but the little lady stopped still.

"Stephen Chisely!"

She moved forward and laid a detaining touch upon his arm, and looked up questioningly into his face: —

"Won't you speak to me?"

The voice was so soft and musical, the intonation so winning, that he checked his impulse of flight; but he stared at her half bewildered.

"You haven't forgotten me — Yvonne Latour?" she continued.

"Forgotten you? No," he replied, slowly. "But I am not accustomed to being recognised."

"The world is very full of hateful people."

she said. "Oh! how wretchedly ill you are looking! That was why you were sitting down on the doorstep. My poor fellow!"

There was a suggestion of tears in her eyes He turned his head away quickly.

"You must n't talk to me like that," he said, huskily. "I 'm not fit for you to speak to. When I went under, I went under — for good and all. Good-bye, Madame Latour — and God bless you for saying a kind word to me."

"Why need you go away? Walk a little with me, won't you? We can go along to the Park and sit quietly and talk."

"Do you really mean it — that you would walk with me — in the public streets?"

"Why, of course," she replied, with a little air of surprise. "Did we not have many walks together in the old days? Do you think I have forgotten? And you want friends so, so badly that even poor little me may be of some good. Come."

They moved away together, and walked some steps in silence. He was too dazed with the sudden realisation of his yearning for human tenderness to find adequate speech. At last he said harshly: —

"You know what you are doing? You are

in the company of a man who committed a disgraceful crime and has rotted in a gaol for two years."

"Ah, don't say such things," said Madame Latour. "You hurt me. There are hundreds of people in this great London, honoured and respected, who have done far worse than you. Hundreds of thousands," she added, with exaggerated conviction. "Besides, you are still my good, kind friend. What has passed cannot alter that."

"I can't understand it yet," he said lamely. "You are the first who has said a kind word to me."

"Poor fellow!" said Yvonne again.

They emerged into the Bayswater Road. Before he had time to remonstrate, she had hailed an omnibus going eastward. "We will get out at the corner of the Park. You must n't walk too much.

The 'bus stopped. He entered with her and sat down by her side. When the conductor came for the fares, Yvonne opened her purse quickly; but a flush came over her companion's pale face as he divined her intention. "You must let me,' he said, producing a couple of pence from his pocket.

The rattling of the vehicle prevented serious conversation. The talk drifted naturally into the desultory commonplace. Madame Latour explained that she had been giving the last singing lesson of the season at a house on the other side of Holland Park, that her pupil had neither ear nor voice, and that by the time she had learned the accompaniment to a song it had already grown out of date. "People are so stupid, you know."

She said it with such an air of conviction, as if she had discovered a brand-new truth, that the man smiled. She noted it with her quick, feminine glance, and felt gladdened. It was so much better to laugh than to cry. She was encouraged to chatter lightly upon passing glimpses of people in the street, of amusing incidents in her profession as a concert singer. When the 'bus stopped, she jumped out, disregarding his gravely offered hand, and laughed, her face glowing with animation.

"Oh, how nice it is to be with you again!" she said, as they crossed to the entrance gate of Kensington Gardens. "Say that you are glad you met me!

"It is like a drop of water on the tongue of the damned," he said in a low voice — too low,

however, for her to hear, for she continued to look up at him, all smiles and sweetness.

She seemed a thing of warmth and sunshine, too impalpable for the rough uses of the world. One would have said she was the embodied spirit of the warm south of Keats's ode. Her dark hair, massed in a hundred little waves over her forehead and temples, gave an indescribable softness to her face. A faint tinge of rose shone through her dark skin. Her great brown eyes contained immeasurable depths of tenderness. A subtly-mingled, all-pervading sense of summer and the exquisitely feminine enveloped her from the beautiful hair to her tiny feet. She was in the sweetest bloom of her womanhood and she had all the unconscious, half-pathetic charm of a child. In a crowded ball-room, amidst dazzling dresses and flashing arms and necks and under the electric light, Yvonne's beauty might have passed unnoticed. But there, in the shady walk upon which they had just entered, in that quiet world of cool greens and shadowed yellows, she appeared to the man's weary eyes the most beautiful thing on the earth.

"How sweet it is here," she said, as they sat down upon a bench.

"Incomprehensibly sweet," he replied.

His tone touched her. She laid her tiny gloved hand upon his arm.

"I wish I could help you — Mr. Chisely," she said gently.

"That is no longer my name," he said. "And so you must n't call me by it. I have given it up since — since I came out. Would you care to hear about me? It would help me to speak a little."

"That 's why I brought you here," said Yvonne.

He bent forward, elbows on knees, covering his face in his hands.

"I don't know, after all, that there 's much to say. My poor mother died while I was in prison — you know that; I suppose I broke her heart. Her money was sunk in an annuity. The furniture and things were sold to pay outstanding debts of mine. I came out five months ago, penniless. Everard's bankers communicated with me. As the head of the family he had collected a lump sum of money, which was given to me on condition that I should change my name and never let any of the family hear of my existence again. My mother's people refused to have anything to

do with me. God knows why I was sitting outside their house to-day. Perhaps you think I ought n't to have accepted Everard's gift. A man has n't much pride left after two years' hard labour. . . . . I took the name of Joyce. I saw it on a tradesman's cart as I reached the street after the interview. One name is as good as another."

"But you are still Stephen?" said Yvonne.

"I suppose so. I have hardly thought of it. Yes, I suppose I keep the Stephen. . . . . I am husbanding this money. I have only that between me and starvation, if anything happened, you know. What I have passed through is not the best thing for one's health. Meanwhile, I am trying to get work. It is a bit hopeless. I know I ought to go out of England, but London is in my blood somehow. I am loth to leave it. Besides, what should I do in the colonies? I am not fit for hard manual labour. They tried it in there, and I broke down; I made sacks and helped in the kitchen most of my time. If I could earn a pound a week in London, I should n't care. It would keep body and soul together. Why I should want to keep them together I don't know. I suppose my spirit is broken, and I

am too apathetic to commit suicide. If I had the spirit of a louse I should do so. But I have n't."

He stopped speaking and remained with his head bowed in his hands. Yvonne could find no words to reply. His almost brutal terseness had given her a momentary perception of his self-abasement which surprised and frightened her. Generous and tender-hearted as she was, she had ever found men insoluble enigmas. They knew so much, had so many strange wants, seemed to exist in a world of ideas, feelings, and actions beyond her ken. Here was one with nameless experiences and shames. She shrank a few inches along the seat, not from repulsion, but from a sudden sense of her own incapacity of comprehension. She felt tongue-tied and helpless. So there was a short silence.

Joyce noticed the lack of spontaneous sympathy, and, raising a haggard face, said : —

"I have shocked you."

"You talk so strangely," said Yvonne — "as if you had a stone instead of a heart."

"Forgive me," he said, softening at the sight of her distress. "I am ungrateful to you. I ought to be happy to-day. I will be happy. I

should like to bend down and kiss your feet for sitting here with me."

The change in his tone brought the colour back into Yvonne's face and the sun into her eyes. She was a creature of quick impulses.

"Have I really made you happy? I am so glad. I seem to be always trying to make people happy and never succeeding."

"They must be strange people you have dealt with," said Joyce with a weary smile.

She shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"I suppose it is that other people are so strange and I am so ordinary."

"You are the kindest, sunniest soul on earth," said Joyce. "You always were."

"Oh, how can you say so?" she cried, shaking her head. She was all brightness again. "I am such an insignificant little person. Everything about me seems so small. I have a small body, a small voice, a small sphere, a small mind, and oh! I live in such a small, tiny flat. You must come and see me. I will sing to you — that is my one small talent — and perhaps that will cheer you. You must be so lonely!"

"Why are you so good to me?" Joyce asked.

"Because you look wretched and ill and miserable," she said impulsively, "and I can t bear it. You were good to me once. Do you remember how kindly you settled everything for me after Amédée left me? I don't know what I should have done without you. And then, your mother. Ah, I know," she continued, lowering her voice a little, "I know, and I cried for you. I saw her just before the end came and she spoke of you. She said 'Yvonne, if ever you meet Stephen, give him a kind word for my sake. He will have the whole world against him.' And I promised — but I should have done just the same if I had n't promised. There is n't any goodness in it."

He pressed her hand dumbly. Her eyes swam with starting tears, but his were dry. Sometimes when he thought of the devastation his crime had wrought, he would fall on his knees and bury his face, and long that he could ease his heart in a storm of weeping. But it seemed too dead for passionate outburst. Yet he had never felt so near to emotion as at that moment.

They talked for a short while longer, of old days and home memories, bitter-sweet to the young man, and of his present position, whose

hopelessness Yvonne refused to allow. She was anxious to effect a reconciliation between him and his family. His mother's relations who lived in Holland Park she did not know. But his cousin, Everard Chisely, Canon of Winchester, might be brought to more Christian sentiments of forgiveness. She would plead with the Canon the first time that she met him. But Joyce shook his head. No. He was the black sheep. Everard had behaved generously. He must go his own way. No modern Christianity could make a man forget the disgrace that had been brought upon his name by felony. Besides, Everard never went back upon his word. Like Pilate, what he had written, he had written, and there was an end of the matter.

"But how do you come to know Everard?" asked Joyce, wishing to turn the conversation.

"I met him several times at your mother's," replied Yvonne. "He used to be so kind to her. And there he heard me sing — and somehow we have become immense friends. He comes to see me, and I sing to him. Dina Vicary says he comes up to town on purpose. Did you ever hear such a thing? But I can't tell you how respectable it makes me feel — so

impressive you know — a real live dignitary. Once he came when Elsie Carnegie and Vandeleur were there showing me her new song and dance. You should have seen their faces when he came in. Van, who sings in the choir of a West End church, began to talk hymns for all he was worth, while Elsie flicked her lighted cigarette into a flower-pot. It was so funny."

Yvonne broke into a contagious ripple of laughter. Then, remembering the flight of time, she looked at her watch and rose quickly from the seat.

"I had no idea it was so late! I am going out to lunch. Now you will come and see me, won't you? Come to-morrow evening. I live at 40 Aberdare Mansions, Marylebone Road. By the way, do you still sing?"

"I had forgotten there was such a thing as song in the world," said Joyce sadly.

"Well, you 'll remember it to-morrow evening," said Yvonne. "I have an idea. *Au revoir*, then."

"God bless you," said Joyce, shaking hands with her.

She nodded brightly, and tripped away up the path. Joyce watched her dainty figure

until it was out of sight, and then he wandered aimlessly through the Park, thinking of the past hour. And, for a short while, some of the contamination of the gaol seemed to be wiped away.

CHAPTER II

YVONNE

THAT evening Yvonne was standing by the door of a concert-hall, as her friend and fellow-artist Vandeleur adjusted a red wrap round her shoulders. He was a burly, pudding-faced Irishman with twinkling dark blue eyes and a persuasive manner. His fingers lingered about the wrap longer than was necessary.

"Good-bye," said Yvonne, "and thank you." She was feeling a little upset. Vandeleur, a popular favourite, had preceded her on the programme, and his song had been met with rapturous applause.

"You have 'queered' me, Van," she had said, in pure jest.

Whereupon, he had returned to the platform to give his enthusiastically demanded encore, and, to the disappointment of the audience, had sung the most villainous drawing-room ballad he could think of, without an attempt

at expression. The applause had been perfunctory, and Yvonne's appearance had created a quickening of interest. Vandeleur's unnecessary quixotism put Yvonne into a false position. So she thanked him shyly.

"Let me just have ten minutes of a cigarette at home with you," he pleaded.

Yvonne was tired. It was very hot; she had been running hither and thither about London since the morning, and was longing in a feminine way to free herself of hampering garments, and to lie down with a French novel for an hour before going to bed. But when a man spoke to her with that note of entreaty in his voice she did not know how to refuse. She nodded assent. Vandeleur called a cab and they drove together to her flat.

It was up many flights of stairs — the passage was very narrow, the drawing-room very tiny. The big Irishman standing on the hearthrug seemed to fill all the space left by the grand piano. How this article of furniture was ever brought into the flat puzzled Yvonne's friends as much as the entrance of the apples into the dumplings puzzled George III., until some one suggested the same solution of the problem — the flat had been built round

the piano. Everything else in the room was small, like Yvonne herself, the armchairs, the couch, the three occasional tables. A few water-colours hung around the walls. The curtains and draperies were fresh and tasteful. All the room, with its dainty furniture and pretty feminine knick-knacks, was impressed with Yvonne's graceful individuality — all except the immense grand piano, which asserted itself loudly, a polished rosewood solecism. It seemed such a very big instrument for so small a person as Yvonne.

She threw herself into an armchair by the fire, with a little sigh. She had been unusually quiet during the drive home.

"And what's making you miserable?" asked Vandeleur, in a tone of concern.

"I wish you had n't done that, Van," she said, with a wistful puckering of her forehead.

"Ah, there! now you're vexed with me. There never was an animal like me for treading on my dearest friends. I'm like the elephant you may have heard of, that squashed the mother of a brood of chickens by mistake, and, taking it to heart, just like me, gathered the little ones under his wing, and, sitting down upon them, said: 'Ah, be aisy now,

I'll be a mother to you'; he did n't hurt the chickens' feelings exactly — but it was mistaken kindness. Was it your feelings I trampled on?"

"Ah, no, Van," said Yvonne, smiling. "But don't you see, it was doing a thing I can never pay you back for."

"Faith, the sight of your sweet face is payment enough."

"But you can have that for nothing — such as it is."

"It's the sweetest face that ever was made," said the Irishman, flinging a freshly-lighted cigarette into the grate behind him. "I'd cut off my head any day to get a sight of it. But are you wanting to pay me more than that? By my soul, there's just an easy way out of your difficulty, Yvonne!"

He looked down at her, his face very red, and questioning in his eyes. She caught his glance and sat upright, stretching out her hand appealingly. Men had looked at her like that before, — craving for something she had not in her to give. She had always, on such occasions, felt what a shallow, poverty-stricken little soul she was. What was in her that could bring the trouble into men's eyes? Here was Van, the kind friend and good

comrade, going the way of the others. She was frightened and distressed.

"Oh, Van, don't!" she cried. "Not that. I can't bear it!"

She covered her face with her hands, as he came quickly forward and leaned over her chair.

"Just a tiny bit of love, Yvonne. So small that you would n't miss it. I could do with it all, but I know I can't get that. I only ask for a sample. Come, Yvonne."

But Yvonne shook her head.

"Don't, Van," she repeated, piteously; "you 're hurting me."

Her tone was so pathetic that the big man drew himself up, thumped his chest, and seized his hat. "I 'm a great big brute to come and take advantage of you like this. Of course you could n't care about a great fat bounder like me. And you 're half dropping with weariness. It 's a villain I am. I 'll leave you to your sleep, poor little woman. Good night."

He held out his hand, and she allowed hers to remain in it for a moment.

"I have n't been ungrateful to you, have I?" she asked. "I did n't mean to be. But I thought you were different."

"How, different?"

"That you would never make love to me. Don't, Van, please. It would spoil it all."

"Well, perhaps it would," replied Vandeleur, philosophically. "Only it is so devilish hard not to make love to you when one's got the chance. And, begad! if you'd just give up looking like a little warm, brown saint, it would be better for the peace of mind of the men."

He stooped and touched her hand with his lips and strode buoyantly out of the room. She heard him humming one of his songs along the passage, then the slam of the front door; then there was silence, and Yvonne went to bed with a grateful sense of escape from unknown dangers. Still, she was sorry for Vandeleur, although she had a dim perception of the superficiality of his passion. It would have been nice, had it been possible, to make him happy. She had a queer, unreasonable little feeling that she had been selfish. She sighed as she settled herself to sleep. The ways of the world were very complicated.

To those who knew her it was often a subject for marvel that she was not crushed in the fierce struggle of life. A creature so yielding,

so simple, so unaffected by experience or the obvious external lessons of the world, and yet standing serenely in the midst of the turmoil, seemed an incongruity —gave a sense of shock, a prompting to rescue, such as would arise from the sight of a child in the middle of a roadway clashing with traffic. She was made for protection, tenderness, all the sheltering luxuries and amenities of life. It was a flaw in the eternal fitness of things that she was alone, earning her livelihood, with nothing but her sweetness and innocence to guard her from buffeting and downfall.

Yet it was her very simplicity that saved her from outward strain; and inward stress was as yet spared her, through her unawakened child-nature. She laughed when folks pitied her. To earn her living was an easy matter. Born in the profession, trained for it from her earliest days, she had taken to it as a young swan to the water. Engagements came like the winds, the visits of her friends, and other such natural and commonplace phenomena. She sang, or gave her lessons, and the money was paid in to the branch of the City Bank close by her flat, and when she needed funds for her modest expenses she wrote a cheque and sent

her maid to cash it. When her balance was getting low, she practised little economies and postponed payment of bills; when it was high, she settled her debts, bought new clothes, and had a dozen oysters now and then for supper. It was very simple. She did not pity herself at all. Nor did she feel the trouble of her past married life. It had gone by like a cloudy day, forgotten in succeeding sunshine, and had left singularly little trace upon her character. Even the period of unhappiness had not weighed unduly. A more resistful nature might have been wrecked irretrievably; but Yvonne had been cast upon the shoals only for a season.

When Amédée Bazouge, a Parisian tenor who had settled in London, first met her, he was surfeited with various blonde beauties of the baser sort, and in a sentimental mood, during which he frequently invoked the memory of his mother, he chose to fall desperately in love with little brown Yvonne, likening her to the Blessed Virgin and as many saints as he recollected. Yvonne was very young; this sudden worship was new to her; the pain in his heart that he so passionately dwelt upon seemed a terrible thing for her to have caused. She married

him because he said that his life was at stake. She gave him herself as she would have given sixpence to a poor man in the street. Why she was necessary to his life's happiness she could not guess. However, Amédée said so, and she took it on faith.

For a while she was mildly content in his exuberant delight. He whispered, in soft honeymoon hours, "*m'aimes-tu?*" — and she said "Yes," because she knew it would please him; but she was always happier at other times, when she was not called upon for display or expression of feeling. She liked him well enough. His somewhat common handsomeness pleased her, his effervescent fancy and boulevard wit kept her lightly amused, and his vehement passion provided her with an interest strangely compounded of fright, wonder, and pity.

But Amédée Bazouge was not made either by nature or education for the domestic virtues. His repentant mood passed away; he forgot the memory of his mother, and found Yvonne's innocence grow insipid. He hankered after the strange goddesses with their full-flavoured personalities, their cynicism, their passions, and their stimulating variety. Regret came to him for having broken with the last, who always

kept him in a state of delicious uncertainty whether she would overwhelm him with passionate kisses or break the looking-glass in a tempest of wrath. So, gradually, he sought satisfaction for his reactionary yearnings and drifted away from Yvonne. And then she grew unhappy. He did not treat her unkindly. In all their dealings with each other a harsh word never passed the lips of either. But she felt cold and neglected. Instead of being met after a concert and accompanied to their little house at Staines, she went the long journey alone. The quiet evenings of music and singing together were things of the past. Often a week elapsed without their meeting. To complete her trouble, her mother died suddenly, and Yvonne felt very lonely. She would sit sometimes and cry like a lost child.

At last they parted. Amédée returned to Paris, and Yvonne took her little flat in the Marylebone Road. The clouds passed by and Yvonne was happy again. She had retained professionally her maiden name of Latour, and now she assumed it altogether, only changing the former "Mademoiselle" into "Madame." Her husband faded into a vague memory. When she received news of him it was through a

paragraph in the "Figaro," announcing his death in a Paris hospital. She wore a little crape bonnet to notify to the world the fact of her widowhood, but she had no tears to shed. When friends condoled with her over her sad lot, she opened her round eyes in astonishment.

"But, my dear, I am as happy as I can possibly be," she would say in remonstrance. And it was true. She had come through the ordeal of an unhappy marriage, pure and child-like, her heart unruffled by passion and her soul unclouded by disillusion.

There are some women born to be loved by many men, yielding, trustful, appealing irresistibly to the masculine instincts of protection and possession. Sometimes they are carried off by one successful owner and bear him children, and hear nothing of the hopeless loves that they inspire. Sometimes, like Yvonne, they are at the mercy of every gust of passion that stirs the hearts of the men around them. They are too innocent of the meaning and scope of love to bide the time when love shall take them in its grip; too weak, tender, and compassionate to harden their hearts against the sufferings of men. If they fall, the world is unsparing in condemnation. If happy circumstance shel-

ters them, they are canonised for virtues that stop short of their logical conclusion. Wherefore we are tempted to say hard things of the world.

Fate, however, had dealt not unkindly with Yvonne. At times her path had been sadly tangled and she had sighed, as she did this night after Vandeleur's unexpected declaration. But chance had always come to her aid and cleared her way. She trusted to it now as she fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

IN THE DEPTHS

"If you step this way, the manager will see you," said the clerk, lifting the flap of the counter.

Joyce rose from the cane-bottomed chair on which he had been sitting, and followed the clerk through the busy outer office into the private room beyond. An elderly man in gold spectacles looked up from his desk.

"What can I do for you?"

"I am seeking employment," said Joyce, "can you give me any?"

"Employment?"

If Joyce had asked him for Prester John's cap, or the Cham of Tartary's beard, his tone could not have expressed more surprise.

"Yes," replied Joyce. "I don't mind what it is — clerk, copyist, handy-man, messenger — so long as it 's work."

"Utterly impossible," said the manager, shortly.

"Would it be of any use to leave my address?" asked Joyce.

"Not a bit. Good day to you."

Joyce walked out apathetically on to the landing. It was a nest of city offices in a great block of buildings in Fenchurch Street, a labyrinth of staircases, passages, and ground-glass doors black-lettered with the names of firms. He was going through them systematically. Often he could not gain access to a person in authority. When he succeeded, it was the same history of rebuff. He felt somewhat downcast at the result of this last interview, the cheerful alacrity with which he had been received having given him an unreasonable hope. He paused for a few moments deciding upon what door to try next. Some names looked encouraging, others forbidding — a futile superstition, yet one not without influence upon his unfed mind. Why "Griffith & Swan" should have attracted and "Willoughby Bros." repelled him is a psychological problem that must forever remain insoluble. It is none the less a fact that he bent his steps along the passage to the door of the first-mentioned firm. But there he was repulsed at the outset. The chiefs were engaged. Had he an appointment?

What was his business? The only way to see the chiefs was by writing to fix an interview. Joyce retired, climbed wearily up the stone staircase to the next floor. Everywhere the same monotonous result.

At last his application was seriously entertained. His heart beat anxiously. It was at a firm of shipping agents. Two clerks had gone on their holiday, another one had just that morning fallen ill. They were short-handed. The junior partner, a brisk young fellow, looked shrewdly at Joyce, divining his education and capacity.

"I could give you some temporary work, certainly. Only too glad, for we are in a hole. But of course we must have some references."

"I am afraid I can give you none," replied Joyce. "I have had a good education and business training, and I could do your work. But I 'm a lonely man — without friends."

"What have you been doing lately for a living."

The matter-of-fact question turned his heart sick. He had known that he would have to answer it before he could enter upon any employment; but he had always shrunk from formulating a plausible reply, weakly trusting

to his mother-wit when the dreaded moment should come. Now his mother-wit deserted him. He could think of nothing but the past reality.

"I would rather tell you nothing about myself," he said lamely.

The young partner shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly.

"Well, that's your affair. But you see we can't take a stranger into our office without his giving us some formal voucher for his honesty."

Joyce looked at him appealingly, with glistening eyes, a new Moses on Mount Nebo. Only then did he fully realise the utter hopelessness of his position. The veriest office-boy needed a certificate of character. He had none.

The partner, clean-shaven, ruddy-cheeked, was lounging against the mantel-piece, hands in pockets, a whimsical smile playing around the corners of his mouth. His speech, though business-like, was kindly. He looked a gentleman. Joyce was seized with a mad, despairing impulse. He flushed to the roots of his hair, clenched his hands by his sides and advanced an involuntary step towards his interlocutor.

"I will tell you the truth," he cried breath-

lessly. "I must find work soon or I shall starve. Give it to me and I will work night and day for you. I took a double first at Oxford. I practised as a solicitor. I lived beyond my means and misappropriated trust-money. I could not pay it back. My name was struck off the rolls and I had two years' hard labour. I have been looking for work every day for five months. I am not such a fool as to risk that hell again. For God's sake give me a chance and set me on my feet again."

His voice rang with the agony of entreaty. His lips quivered. When he ceased speaking he was shaking from head to foot.

The young man shifted the crossing of his feet and put up an eyeglass that had been dangling on his waistcoat.

"Well, you have pretty damned cheek, I must say!" he remarked, with a drawl.

Joyce stared at him for a moment stupidly, and then turned away without a word, crushed and humiliated to his soul. Round and round the rectangular well-staircase he went, dizzy with the reaction. He could knock at no more doors. The names seemed to swell large and to jeer at him as he passed. A burst of laughter from two men, issuing from some office above,

echoed and rattled down the staircase and jarred upon every nerve of his body. He quickened his pace to a run, and did not stop until he reached the sweltering street. White and faint he leant against the wall, vaguely conscious of the ceaselessly hurrying mass that passed him by. After a minute or two he recovered self-possession enough to move onwards with the westward stream on the pavement. His quest of work was abandoned. He could only feel sickening regret for having given way to his insane impulse and shrink from the echoing tones of the other man's cynical contempt. The last shred of his self-respect was torn away. He seemed to be the naked gaol-bird before those thousand eyes that glanced upon him. The idea grew into morbid exaggeration. A man or woman making way for him to pass appeared to be shrinking from the soil of his touch. Every policeman was identifying him. A penny-toy man by the Mansion House, who had taken off his cap and was scratching a closely-cropped head, grinned at him with the familiarity of an old acquaintance.

It became unbearable. He fled into a public-house in Cheapside and ordered a glass of whisky. The spirit ran through his veins

comfortingly. He drank another, and went out into the street. Soon the spirit, acting on an empty stomach, dulled his senses and provoked a vague suggestion of debauch as the only consoler. In the days of his vanity Joyce had known the flush of wine on joyous nights, but drunkenness had always been hateful to him. Yet now, in his morbid state, the temptation was irresistible. He went from tavern to tavern with dull, stupid recklessness, cognisant only of the motive to drink and of his own mechanical personality. At last, staggering out of a public-house in Fleet Street, he tripped at the threshold and fell insensible on the pavement.

When he recovered consciousness it was quite dark. For a few moments he did not seek to discover where he was. But a chance movement caused him nearly to fall from where he lay, and he started to a sitting posture. His feet touched the ground sooner than he expected ; the slight shock completed his awakening. Where was he ? He stretched out his hand and felt the wall. It was stone. Stone, too, was the floor, as he found by stamping his foot. Then the truth burst upon him with indescribable terror. It was the cell of a police station. Although his head swam and his eye-

balls ached, the fright of the discovery had thoroughly sobered him. It was the final calamity and degradation of the day. He was in prison again. He would again have to put on the hateful clothes and cower beneath the warder's glance. Once more he would have to go through that dreadful ignominy. Exaggerating the consequences of his misdemeanour, he conjured up all the horrors of his previous term. A sense of utter self-loathing swelled within him like a nausea. He crouched on the narrow bench, holding his hair in a feverish grasp. The gaol had got him, body and soul. It was all that he was fit for.

An hour passed. Then the door opened and a policeman appeared in the light of the passage. Joyce looked up at him haggardly.

"Oh, you 're all right now, are you? Better come up and see the Inspector."

Joyce staggered to his feet and clutched the policeman's supporting arm.

"I was in great trouble," he said hoarsely. "And then the heat — an empty stomach — a few glasses knocked me over."

"Explain that upstairs," replied the other. "Bless you, it 'll be all square."

Brought before the Inspector, he pulled him-

self together and pleaded his cause with an intensity that amused the officials. They could see nothing tragic in a "drunk and incapable."

"Very well," said the Inspector at last. "I see it was an accident. Call it heat-apoplexy. I sha'n't charge you. You had better get home to bed."

Joyce grew faint with the revulsion of feeling, and steadied himself by the iron railing. One of the men took him to the door, hailed a passing cab and helped him in. At first, ill and dizzy as he was, he felt the animal's instinctive joy in suddenly regained liberty. The non-fulfilment of his agonising forebodings filled him with a wondering sense of relief. But this did not last long. Despair and self-abhorrence resumed their hold upon him, causing him to shiver in the cab as with an ague.

He crawled upstairs to his attic, and after having procured some food, of which he ate as much as he could swallow, he went to bed and fell into a heavy sleep. In the middle of the night he woke with a start. The recollection of his engagement with Yvonne Latour had penetrated through the sub-consciousness of half-awakening. He uttered a cry of dismay.

All the previous evening and all that morning he had thought of the promised visit. To sit in a lady's room, to live for a moment a bit of the old life, to forget his pariahdom in Yvonne's welcoming smile, to have the comfort of her exquisite pity — the prospect had rendered him almost buoyant during the early part of his round. But the pain and fever of after-events had driven her from his mind. Now, in his suffering state, it seemed as if he had lost an offered corner of Paradise, rejected the one hand that was stretched out to save him from perdition. He lay awake many hours. At last, toward dawn, he fell asleep again and did not wake till mid-day.

He rose, rang for his breakfast, which was brought him, as usual, on a tray, by the slatternly maid-of-all-work. He was still feeling prostrated in mind and body. Having eaten what he could, he drew up the blind to look at the day. The fine weather was still lasting. But he felt no desire to go out. What was the use? Judging by the lesson of yesterday it would be futile to continue his search for employment. As he turned away from the window, he caught sight of his white haggard face and bloodshot eyes in the mirror, and he

shrank back, as though it revealed to him the miserable weakness of his soul. Then he threw himself half-dressed upon the bed, and there he remained, abandoning himself to the hopeless inaction of defeat, and eating his heart out in remorse for the shipwreck he had made of his life.

He did not pose before himself as a victim to circumstance. Could he have done so, he might have found some poor consolation. His criminal folly lay as much upon his soul as its punishment. Again, it had not been a grand stroke of villainy requiring for its execution a masterly coolness and genius for which he might at least have had an intellectual admiration. But it had been of the same petty sort as that of the shop-boy led astray by low turf associates, who pilfers day by day from his master's till, hoping the luck will turn and enable him to replace the stolen shillings. The difference had been merely one of degree. His operations had been on a larger scale, his vices more fastidious, his circle of loose friends more aristocratic. But he had had the same contemptible motives for his crime, and the same contemptible excuses. He spared himself no arrow of self-scorn.

Latterly, through sheer weariness, he had grown apathetic, taking his self-abasement as one of the conditions of life. A man is not physiologically capable of continuous outburst. But now the iron had entered deep into his soul, causing him to writhe in torment.

What would be the end? The question haunted him, and yet it seemed scarcely worth consideration. There was no employment to be obtained by such as he. He would eke out his small capital as far as possible, and when that was exhausted, he could put an end to his worthless life. Or would his cowardice drag him down among the class of habitual criminals, lead him to crime as a means of livelihood? He shuddered, remembering his short spell of agony in the cell of yesterday.

The hours passed. Towards evening he dressed himself and went out to a dingy Italian restaurant near Victoria station, where he usually dined. On coming out again into the street he hesitated for some time as to what he should do next. He thought of Yvonne with wistful longing, but had not the courage to go and seek her. The sense of degradation was too strong upon him. He shrank with morbid sensitiveness from taking advantage of her

guilelessness by bringing his contamination into her presence. For, paradoxical as it may seem, an instinctive pride still remained in the man. Had he chosen to lay it aside, doubtless more than one of his former friends would have consented to receive him on some sort of terms of acquaintanceship. But he had sought out none, and if chance brought him into sight of a familiar face in the street, he effaced himself and hurried on. Yvonne was the only figure out of the past with whom he had communicated. And now he had cut himself adrift from her.

After a few undecided turns up and down the pavement, he directed his steps mechanically to a customary haunt of his, the billiard-room of a public-house in Westminster. It was better than the wearying streets and the choking solitude of his attic. A couple of shabby men in dingy shirt-sleeves were playing at the table. On the raised divan, in the gloom of the walls, sat a silent company of lookers-on. With a group of these, Joyce exchanged nods, and took his place sombrely among them. They were a depressed, out-at-elbows crew, who came here night after night, speaking little, drinking less, and never playing billiards at all. They watched the game, now and then

applauded, oftener condoled with the loser than congratulated the winner. They formed an orderly and appreciative gallery, and set, as it were, a tone of decorum in the room; and for this reason their presence was not discouraged by the landlord. Eight was their average number. They were mostly men in the prime of life, and belonged, as far as one could judge by their voluntary confidences, to the obscure fringes of journalism, the stage, and independence. Those who occupied the last position lived chiefly on their wives. There was a decayed medical student who did Heaven knows what for a living, and a red-headed, vulgar man, who gave out that he had thrown up a country rectorship, through conscientious scruples. Differing widely as they did in personality, yet they retained one common characteristic. Failure seemed written on each man's face. A kind of mutual affinity had drawn them together. To Joyce's cynical humour it appeared as if something more than mere chance had caused him to stumble upon them one evening two months before.

"I 'm afraid I have left my 'baccy at home," said the man sitting next to Joyce, who was filling his pipe. "Thank you very much. A

change in tobacco is very gratifying at times to the palate."

He was a man of singular appearance. The bones in his face were very large, the flesh scanty; his nose hooked, his eyebrows black and meeting. His long upper-lip and his chin were shaven; but he wore thick black mutton-chop whiskers which contrasted oddly with a bush of whitening hair above his temples and at the back of his head. Whether he was bald or not, no one ever knew, as he always retained his hat fixed in one never-changing, respectable angle. This hat was very, very old, an extravagantly curled silk hat of the masher days in the early eighties. But the most striking feature of his costume consisted in a long thick Chesterfield overcoat which he obviously wore without coat or waistcoat beneath. In the sultry August weather the sight of him made the beholder perspire. Although there was no trace of linen at his wrists or down the arms as far as one could see, a dirty frayed collar and a shirt-front adorned with a straight black tie appeared above the tightly buttoned overcoat. Joyce knew him by the name of Noakes.

He looked at Joyce, as he spoke, out of pale-blue, unspeculative eyes, and returned the

tobacco-pouch. "You had better take another fill or two, while you are about it," said Joyce.

"I don't like to trespass upon your generosity," said Noakes. But he helped himself plentifully, tying up the tobacco in his pocket-handkerchief. They smoked on during a long silence, broken only by the click of the billiard-balls, the monotonous cry of the marker, and occasional murmurs of applause. The air was heavy with drink and tobacco-smoke, fresh and stale.

"I must be getting back to work," said Noakes at last.

The word roused Joyce from the lethargy into which he had fallen. He had never associated Noakes with definite employment. For a moment he envied him.

"I wish to heaven I could," he said.

"A man of your attainments," replied Noakes, respectfully, "ought never to be at a loss. Now I should say you have been to a public school?"

Joyce nodded.

"And the university?"

Joyce did not reply, but Noakes went on: "Yes; one can see it. Somehow a man of acute observation can always tell. I remember

your correcting me the other night when I spoke of Plato's dramatic unities. I looked up the matter in the British Museum, and found that you were right in attributing them to Aristotle. As I said before, a man of your education ought to have no difficulty."

"You might suggest something," said Joyce, with a shade of irony.

"Authorship."

"Are you an author?"

"With all due modesty, I may say that I am," returned Noakes, gravely. "I don't find it very remunerative, but I attribute that solely to the deficiencies in my education."

"What do you write?" asked Joyce, interested in spite of himself in this odd, pathetic figure.

"I have adopted two branches of the profession — one, the literary advertisement; the other, popular fiction."

He drew a halfpenny evening paper from his pocket, and, designating a half-column with his thumb, handed it to Joyce. It was headlined "Nihilism in Russia," opened with an account of Siberian horrors, and ended, of course, with somebody's pills.

"I always pride myself upon there being

more literary quality in my work than is usually given to that class of thing," he remarked complacently, while Joyce idly ran through the column. "And in my fiction I always try to keep the best models before me, Stevenson and Mayne Reid. I happen to have a copy of one of my latest works in my pocket. Perhaps it might interest you to glance through it. In return for the tobacco, — with the author's compliments."

Joyce received into his hands a thin volume in a gaudy paper wrapper. It was entitled "The Doom of the Floating Fiend." The printing, in packed double-column, and the paper were execrable. The author's name did not figure beneath the title. From the most cursory glance through the pages, Joyce could see they were deluged in blood.

"I shall be glad to read it," he said, mendaciously, putting it into his pocket.

"If you find anything noteworthy of criticism in my style, I should feel grateful for you to tell me," said Noakes. "My ambition is to write some day for a more cultured public. I have a pastoral idyll that I shall write when I have time. But, you see, there is a continuous market for books of adventure."

He spoke in a toneless, even voice, without a shade of enthusiasm or regret appearing in his eyes.

"Do you think it would be of any use for an outsider to try it — one not in the swim with the publishers?" asked Joyce, curiously.

"Certainly. But one needs the imaginative faculty. If you'll look at my forehead, you will see I have it firmly developed. Allow me to look at yours. Yes; I see it there. Once started, it is constant employment. They pay half a crown per thousand words. I do my three thousand a day."

Noakes rose to depart.

"Thanks for the information," said Joyce. "I may try my hand. Won't you have a glass with me before you go?"

"No, thank you," said Noakes. "I find stimulants interfere with brain-work. Good evening."

Noakes gone, Joyce found himself next to the red-headed ex-rector, who was fast asleep, his dirty, pudgy fingers clasped in his lap. He remained, therefore, solitary, and after having looked for some time dejectedly at the three ever-clicking balls on the table, he went out again into the street.

Noakes's hint had taken root in his mind. If that dilapidated man could maintain himself honestly by "popular fiction," surely he could do so too. Off and on during the last five months he had striven to write an article or short story, but his mind had refused to work. The conviction that his intellect had been shattered during those two awful years had added to his despair. But now he told himself that this was work in which intellectual subtlety and fastidiousness would prove a hindrance. The one thing needful was imagination: also a terrible faculty for continuous quill-driving. To gain a livelihood there would have to be written daily stuff equal to three columns of the "Globe" newspaper. And seven-and-sixpence as the reward! A noble end, he thought bitterly to himself as he walked along, to the ambition of Stephen Chisely, double-first of New College, Oxford — to become a writer of "penny bloods."

Still, the suggestion had acted as a stimulus. When he entered his room, he did not feel so broken and purposeless as when he had left it. The intellectual effort he had made whilst walking home in scheming out an experimental chapter had broken the spell of morbid introo-

spection. As soon as he had lit the gas, he drew out writing materials, and, sitting before his dressing-table, began the scene of slaughter he had arranged. At the end of a couple of hours he found he had written two slips of one hundred and fifty words each. He regarded them ruefully. At that rate it would take him twenty hours a day to earn his seven-and-sixpence. The idea occurred to him to look at the "Doom of the Floating Fiend." He read a few pages and then dropped the work hopelessly on to the floor. The instinct of the scholar and man of culture awakened in revolt. His mind would not be prostituted to stuff like that.

"Sooner death!" he said to himself, with whimsical bitterness. His own carefully elaborated efforts he tore up with a sigh. Then, tired out, he prepared to go to bed.

Suddenly, in the midst of his undressing, he caught sight, to his immense surprise, of a letter lying on his counterpane, where the maid of all work had carelessly thrown it. From whom could it be? Letters were things of an almost forgotten past. It was in a woman's hand. Then he remembered he had given his address to Yvonne. The letter was from her, and ran:—

"DEAR STEPHEN, — Oh, why did n't you come last night? I was *so* disappointed. You surely did n't think I only asked you out of politeness. I hope nothing has happened to you. My head was running over all day with a little plan for you. Do come and catch it before it all runs away. I shall be in to-morrow afternoon.

You know it 's just like old times — writing a silly little note to you.

Yours sincerely,

YVONNE LATOUR."

Joyce went to bed and slept the sound sleep of a jaded man. But the letter lay under his pillow.

CHAPTER IV

DEA EX MACHINA

"THERE 's nothing like leather," cried Yvonne, gaily. "If I had been a milliner, I should have thought what a gentlemanly shopwalker you would have made. As I am a singer, I can only think of the profession. You did n't know I was so philosophical, did you?"

"But I can't sing a note now, Madame Latour," said Joyce.

"We 'll try after you have had some tea. But you 'll be good enough for Brum, I 'm quite sure. If he did n't take you on I should never speak to him again."

With which terrible threat she poured the tea outside the cup into the saucer.

"It seems too good to be true," said Joyce, in a subdued tone. "It seemed impossible I should ever get work among honest men again. I am deeply grateful to you, Madame Latour — I cannot tell you how deeply."

"Here is some tea," said Yvonne, cup in hand, "I have put milk in, but no sugar. I am so glad you like my little scheme. I was afraid it was n't worth your while."

Joyce laughed ironically.

"You would n't say that if you knew the posts I have sought after, the advertisements I have answered. It will be a fortune to me."

"And it may lead — how far, you don't know. Why in two or three years you may be playing a leading part in a West End light opera. Or you may do dramatic business and come to the top. One never can tell. Won't it be nice when you can command your £40 or £50 a week?"

Yvonne was very happy. She had conceived the plan all by herself and had gone off impulsively to Brum to put it into execution. Joyce's future was assured. His cleverness, of which she used to be a little afraid in earlier years, would soon lift him from the ranks. She was excited over this forecast of his success. But Joyce could not look so far ahead. All he could feel was a wondrous relief to find a door still open for him, gratitude to the woman who had led him to it. His spirit

was too shrouded to catch a gleam of her enthusiasm. She strove to brighten him.

"You will find Brum all right. He has always been good to me, since I stepped into a gap for him once at a charity matinée — a medley entertainment, you know. When he has a theatre in London he always sends me a box, if there's one vacant. You see, I knew he was taking out 'The Diamond Door,' into the provinces, and he pays pretty high salaries all round — so I did n't see why you should n't have a chance in the chorus. Oh, you 'll like the stage so much. I wish I were on, instead of singing at concerts. I have always hankered after it."

"Why don't you make the change?" asked Joyce.

"I 'm not good enough. I am too insignificant. But I don't really mind. I love singing for singing's sake, no matter where it is. I only have one great anxiety in life — that I should lose my voice. Then I should put my head under my wing and die, like the *cigale*. That is to say, if the *cigale* has wings — has she?"

"Yes, pretty brown wings — as yours must be. I believe you have them somewhere hidden from us."

"You must n't make pretty speeches," said Yvonne, pleased.

"It expresses clumsily what I feel," said Joyce, with a sudden rush of feeling. "I have been asking myself what are the common grounds on which we can meet — you, a pure, bright, beautiful soul — and I, a mean, degraded man, who knows it to be almost an outrage upon you to cross your threshold. I feel we are not of the same human clay. I wonder how it is that the sight of me does n't frighten you. Thank God you don't see me as I see myself."

"Hush!" said Yvonne, gently.

She glanced at him in a puzzled way, unable to comprehend. She knew that he felt his disgrace very deeply, but she could not understand the way in which he related it with herself. Beyond looking careworn and ill, he seemed almost the same externally as in the days of their former intimacy; and more so now than on the occasion of their meeting on the Bank Holiday, when he was shabbily attired. Now he was wearing a new blue serge suit and a carefully tied cravat — he had bought the clothes on the chance of his being suddenly required to be correctly dressed, and this was

his first time of wearing them — and looked at all points the neat, well-groomed gentleman she had always known; so that she found it difficult to realize fully even the change in his material fortunes. The blight that had come over his soul was altogether beyond her power of perception. She could find no words to supplement her sympathetic exclamation, and so there was silence. When she looked at him again, as he sat opposite, his cheek resting on his hand, and his mournful eyes fixed upon her, she found herself thinking what a good-looking fellow he was, with his clear-cut face, refined features and trim blonde moustache. It was a pity he had those deep lines on each side of his mouth and wore so unsmiling an expression. There was sunshine in Yvonne's heart that quickly dissipated clouds. She rose suddenly, and went round to the key-board of the great piano.

"I 'll sing you something first and then we 'll try your voice."

She paused before she sat down, and asked:

"Would you like something sad or something gay?"

The afternoon light, slanting in through the further unshaded window, fell full upon her,

and revealed the warmth of her cheeks and the smiling softness of her lips. To have demanded sadness of her would have been an act of unreason.

"Something bright," said Joyce, instinctively.

She ran her fingers over the keys and broke into a *barcarolle* of Théophile Gautier.

" Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller ?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler !

L'aviron est d'ivoire,
Le pavillon de moire,
Le gouvernail d'or fin ;
J'ai pour lest une orange,
Pour voile une aile d'ange,
Pour mousse un séraphin."

Her exquisite voice, sounding like crystal in the little room, seemed to Joyce as if it came from the dainty boat. Her sweet face seemed to peep forth under the angel's wing, mocking the seraphic cabin-boy.

The setting was as perfect as her rendering. All the joy and inconsequence of life rang from her lips. She came to the last verse.

" Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller ?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler !

— Menez-moi, dit la belle,
À la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours.
— Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guère
Au pays des amours."

When she had finished, she looked up at him, as he leaned over the tail of the piano, with laughter in her eyes.

" I adore that song. It is so lovely and irresponsible. Canon Chisely says it is cynical. But it always puts me in mind of a dragon-fly."

" I am afraid Everard is right," replied Joyce, with a smile. " But if you live in the fairyland of love, constancy must be a serious hindrance to affairs."

" Oh, now you talk just as you used to ! " cried Yvonne, " I 'll sing you something else.' She scamped the prelude in her impulsive way, and began, " Coming thro' the Rye." His black mood was lifted. The tender, mischievous charm of her voice held him in a

spell, and he smiled at her like "a' the lads" in the song.

"Now it is your turn," she said, reaching towards a pile of songs. "Help me to choose one."

He selected one that he used to sing and commenced it creditably. But after a few bars he broke down. Yvonne encouraged him to take it again, which he did with greater success. But his voice, a high baritone, was wofully out of condition. At a second break-down, he looked at her in dismay.

"I fear it's no good," he said.

"Oh, yes it is," said Yvonne. "They don't want a Santley in the chorus of the provincial company of a comic-opera. We'll have a good long time now. You shall do some scales. And you can come in to-morrow morning, before you go to Brum, and have half-an-hour more, and that will set you right."

The little authoritative air sat oddly upon her. Vandeleur used to say that Yvonne in a business mood was even more serious than a child playing at parson. But she knew she was giving a professional opinion; and that was bound to be serious. Taking him through the scales, then, in her best professional

manner, she brought the practice to a satisfactory conclusion. Then she became the sunny Yvonne again, and, after he had gone, sat smiling to herself with the conscious happiness of a fairy god-mother.

The interview with Brum, the manager, was satisfactory, and Joyce after accepting the engagement at thirty shillings a week, went straight on to rehearse with the rest of the chorus. And after this there were daily rehearsals extending to the Sunday two weeks ahead when the start was to be made for Newcastle, where the company opened. After the first two or three days, the rather helpless sense of unfamiliarity wore off, and Joyce found his task an easy one. His voice, by comparison, certainly warranted his selection, and in knowledge of music and general ability he was vastly superior to his colleagues, who received rough usage for stupidity at the hands of the stage-manager. He found them mostly dull, uneducated men, two or three with wives in the female chorus, very jealous of their rights and the order of precedence among them, but with little ambition and less capacity. In spite of the old suit, which he was careful

to wear, he was looked upon at first, rather resentfully, as an amateur; but he bore disparaging remarks with philosophical unconcern, and, after a judicious drink or two at a "professional" bar near the stage-door of the theatre, he was accepted among them without further demur.

But Joyce was too much exercised at this time with his own relations to himself to think much of his relations to others. The reaction from the most poignant despair he had known since his freedom, to sudden hope, had set working many springs of resolution. He would banish all thoughts of the past from his mind, forget Stephen Chisely in the new man Stephen Joyce, take up the new threads fate had spun for him, and weave them into a new life without allowing any of them to cross the old: a resolution which would be laughable, were it not so eternal, and so pathetic in its futility. The world will never know the enormous expenditure of will-power by its weak men.

The fortnight, however, passed in something near to contentment and peace of soul. If we can cheat ourselves into serenity at times, it is a gift to be thankful for. Besides, occupa-

tion is a great anodyne to trouble; and the provincial production of a great London success offers considerable occupation for those concerned in it. Rehearsals were called twice a day, morning and evening. As Joyce did not leave the theatre until nearly midnight he had no time to look in at the familiar billiard-room, and so Noakes and his "penny bloods" were forgotten. On the other hand he spent several of his afternoons with Yvonne, who was delighted with his accounts of himself, and sent him away cheered and sanguine.

"The only thing I regret," said Joyce, during his farewell visit, "is that I shall be cutting myself off from you. I suppose every one is entitled to a grievance. And this is mine. Do you know you are the only friend I have in the world?"

As Yvonne knew that the world was very big and that she herself was very small, the fact somewhat awed her. She regarded him pityingly for a moment. "What a dreadful thing it must be to feel alone like that."

"I haven't felt it so, since I met you," said Joyce.

"But you won't have even me, any more. I wish I could help you."

"Help me? Why, you 've raised me out of the gutter, Madame Latour."

"Oh, don't call me 'Madame Latour,'" she said, "I don't call you 'Mr. Joyce.' I am 'Yvonne' to all my friends. You used to call me 'Yvonne' once."

"You were not my benefactress then," said Joyce.

"Please don't call me hard names," she returned whimsically, "or I shall be afraid of you, as I used to be."

"Afraid of me?" echoed Joyce.

"Yes. Were n't you dreadfully clever? I was always afraid you would think me silly. And then, often I could not quite understand what you were saying — how much you meant of what you said. Don't you see?"

"I see I must have been insufferable," he replied. "It makes what you are to me now all the more beautiful. But I scarcely dare call you 'Yvonne' — don't you understand? But it would gladden me to write it. May I write to you on my pilgrimage?"

"It would be so good of you, if you would," she answered eagerly. "I do love people to write to me."

She had unconsciously slipped from her

fairy-godmother attitude. Her simple mind could not look upon welcoming his letters as an act of graciousness.

"Would you sing to me once more before I go?" he asked, a little later. "I don't know when I shall see you again, and I should like to carry away a song of yours to cheer me."

She sat down at the piano and sang Gounod's Serenade. Something in its yearning tenderness touched the man in his softened mood. The pure passion of Yvonne's voice pierced through the thick layers of shame and dead hopes and deadening memories that had encrusted round his heart, and met it in a tiny thrill. He leaned back in his chair, staring at the walls, which grew misty before his eyes. The scene changed and he was back again in his mother's house and Yvonne was singing this song. The benumbing spell that had kept him dry-eyed since the news came to him of his mother's death, was lifted for the moment. But, only when a sudden silence broke the charm, was he aware that tears were on his face.

He brushed them away quickly, rose, took her hand and kissed it, and then he laughed awkwardly, and bade her good-bye.

On his way downstairs he brushed against a man ascending. It was a squarely-built, keen-faced man of forty in clerical attire. Each stepped aside to apologise, and then came the flash of recognition. Joyce looked down in some confusion. But Canon Chisely turned on his heel and continued his ascent.

Joyce walked away moodily. His cousin's cut brought back the old familiar sense of degradation which Yvonne had charmed away. Again he realised that he was an outcast, a blot upon society, an object of scorn for men of good repute. No one but Yvonne could have befriended him and forgotten what he was. And Yvonne herself, — was her friendship not perhaps solely due to her childlike incapacity to appreciate the depths of his disgrace? He would have given anything not to have met the Canon on the stairs.

Three weeks afterwards Yvonne was at Brighton for change of air and holiday, accompanied by Geraldine Vicary, her dearest friend, confidante, and chastener. They had taken lodgings in Lansdowne Place, where they shared a sitting-room and discussed Yvonne's prospects and peccadilloes. Not

but what the discussion was continued out of doors, on the Parade, or in a quiet nook on the sands at Shoreham; but it proceeded much more effectively within four walls, where there was nothing to distract Yvonne's attention. Miss Vicary had her friend's good most disinterestedly at heart, and Yvonne herself loved these discussions, very much as she loved church. She felt a great deal better and wiser, without in the least knowing why. In intervals of leisure they idled about, dissected passing finery, and ate prodigious quantities of ices — which, as all the world knows, is the proper way to enjoy Brighton.

They were sitting in one of the shelters on the cliff overlooking the electric toy-railway. It was a lovely day. A sea-breeze ruffled the blue Channel into a myriad dancing ridges, and blew Yvonne's mass of dark hair further back from her forehead. Suddenly she slipped her hand into her friend's.

"Oh, Dina, is n't this delicious!"

"Rapturous," said Geraldine, with a smile. She was a tall, plainly-dressed young woman, some four years older than Yvonne, with a pleasant, frank face and a decided manner. She wore a plain sailor-hat, a blouse, and a

grey-stuff skirt that hung rather badly beneath a buff belt; thus contrasting with Yvonne, who suggested dainty perfection of attire, from the diminutive bonnet to the toe of her little brown shoe. Miss Vicary gave the impression of the typical schoolmistress, which she would most probably have been, had not the possession of a magnificent voice decided her career otherwise.

"I mean it's delicious being here alone with you," returned Yvonne. "Away from men altogether."

"They are a horrid lot," said Geraldine, drily. "I wonder you see as much of them as you do."

"But how can I help it? They will keep coming my way. Oh, I wish they were all women. It would be so much nicer!"

Geraldine broke into a laugh.

"You goose!" she said. "You would n't have the women falling in love with you as the men do!"

"But I don't want them to fall in love with me," cried Yvonne. "It is so stupid. I don't fall in love with them."

"Then why do you give them encouragement? I am always at you about it."

"I am only kind to them, as any one else would be."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear. You should keep them in their place."

"But what *is* their place?" asked Yvonne, pathetically. "I never know. That is why I wish they were women. Oh, I love so being here with you, Dina. I wish I had a lot of women friends that I could talk to when I can't see you. But you're the only real woman friend I've got."

"You dear little mite!" exclaimed Geraldine, with sudden impulse. "I can't see why women don't take to you. And I can understand all the men falling in love with you. Even the Canon."

"Oh, how can you say such a thing?" cried Yvonne, quickly, the colour coming into her cheeks.

"By reason of the intelligence that God has given me, my dear," replied Geraldine. "I would send him packing if I were you."

"It is very kind indeed of a man like that to come and see me."

"And to pick you out from among all the concert singers in London for his musical festival?"

"But we're old friends, Dina. He is only doing me a good turn."

"So as to deserve another, you simple darling. In the meantime, I would n't encourage Vandeleur or your new *protégé*, the Canon's unmentionable cousin."

"You know, I once thought there was something between you and Van," remarked Yvonne, with guileless inconsequence.

"Rubbish!" said Miss Vicary. And then she added, rising hastily, after a moment's silence, "Look, you are getting chilly in this cold wind, — and I am sure you have next to nothing underneath."

To keep Yvonne out of draughts and other pretexts for catching cold was one of Miss Vicary's self-imposed tasks, and she sought to compensate Yvonne's reckless exposure of herself when alone by excess of vigilance on her own part when Yvonne was under her control — which is not an uncommon irrationality in women, who, geniuses or not, have an infinite capacity for taking superfluous pains. However, in spite of her maternal precautions, it happened that Yvonne was laid up two or three days afterwards with a cold which flew at once to her throat. Although in no way seri-

ous, it filled her with dismay. She knew her throat to be delicate. That her voice might one day fail her was the dread of her life.

"What does he say about me?" she asked, pathetically, when Geraldine had returned from a short consultation with the doctor. "Is it going to hurt my voice? Oh, do tell me, Dina?"

"You must n't talk, or else it will," replied Geraldine, severely.

Then she threw off the chastener, put on the consoler, and, sitting on the bed, petted Yvonne until she had restored her mind to a measure of peace.

"Then I must throw up my engagements?" Yvonne asked, wistfully, after a while.

"Certainly the one here next week. But don't bother your dear little head about it."

"And the concerts at Fulminster for Canon Chisely. I must get well for them, Dina."

"Why, of course you will," replied Geraldine. "They are weeks and weeks ahead. Besides, let the Canon go to Jericho!"

"Why are you so hard upon Canon Chisely?" asked Yvonne.

"A case of Dr. Fell, I suppose. I don't like his always hanging about you."

Yvonne burst out laughing.

"I believe you are jealous, Dina," she cried.

Miss Vicary's retort was checked by the entrance of the landlady with Yvonne's supper. She busied herself with the arrangement of plates and dishes on the tray. But all the time the expression on her face was that of a woman who foresees a considerable amount of trouble to come.

CHAPTER V

THE COMIC MUSE

The common dressing-room appointed for the male members of the chorus was crowded with half-attired men, strangely painted and moustachioed. The low, blackened ceiling beat down the heat from the gas-jets over the dressing-ledges, and the air reeked of stuffiness, tobacco, and yellow soap. Everywhere was a confusion of garments, grease-paints, open bags, beer bottles, and half-emptied glasses. It wanted only five minutes to the rise of the curtain, and hurry prevailed among belated ones, who got in each other's way and swore lustily.

Joyce had finished dressing. He wore a mandarin's hat, a green robe, a pigtail, and long, drooping moustaches, like the rest of his companions. Having nothing more to do, he was leaning back against the dressing-table with

folded arms, and staring absently in front of him.

"You are looking down in the mouth, old man," said the man who dressed next to him, turning away from the mirror and buttoning his robe.

"I beg your pardon, McKay?" said Joyce with a start.

"I asked why you were so blooming cheerful," answered the other.

"I was only thinking," said Joyce.

"It seems to be an unpleasant operation, old man."

"Don't you see it's of *her*?" said another man standing by. "They're always like that."

"Perhaps it's better to put her out of your mind and grin — isn't it?" retorted Joyce, pointedly, for the railer's quasi-matrimonial squabbles had already become a byword in the company. McKay burst into a loud laugh, in which those who heard joined, and the railer retired in discomfiture.

"Had him there," said McKay. "Well, how's the world, anyway?"

"Oh, all right!" replied Joyce, vaguely.

"Blake and I took his missus and two of

the girls for a sail to-day," said the other. "If the whole crew had n't been sick, we should have had a gay old time. Been doing anything?"

"No. What is there to do?"

"At Southpool? Why, there's no end of things. I wish we went to some more seaside places, late as it is."

"I don't think it matters much where we go," said Joyce. "Life is just the same."

"I suppose it is, if you moon around by yourself. Why don't you get a pal?"

"Masculine or feminine?" asked Joyce; for there was as much pairing in the company as in the Ark.

"Whichever you please. You pays — no you don't — you takes your choice here without paying your money. But take my tip and keep clear of women. You never know when they'll turn round and scratch you — like cats. After all, what can you expect of 'em? I've done with 'em all long ago."

"What about the sea-sick girls to-day?"

"I would n't touch any of 'em with a ten-foot pole," replied the misogynist, with bitter scorn. "I never was in an engagement where

there was such an inferior lot of ladies. I don't know where the management picked them up. And to think of the number of nice girls in London simply starving for work."

"They seem right enough," said Joyce, indifferently.

"Gad! You should have been with me in 'Mother Goose' at Leeds this winter. I was playing one of the men in the moon — they noticed me from the front. You should have seen the slap-up lot we had there. What kind of shop were you in for the winter?"

"I was in another walk of life," replied Joyce, with a curl of his lips.

At that moment the call-boy's voice was heard in the passages: "Beginners for the first act;" and then he appeared himself at the door.

"Everybody on the stage."

They trooped out, up the narrow stairs and along the dusty passages and through the wings on to the stage, where they were met by the ladies of the chorus, who came on from the other side; and then all grouped themselves in their customary attitudes under the stage-manager's eye. Joyce was posed, second on the left, with a girl resting her

head on his knee. He greeted her as she took her place.

"How are you to-night, Miss Stevens?" he whispered.

"Oh, badly. The heat in the dressing-room is awful."

"So it is in ours. It is a wonder we don't all melt together in a sticky lump."

"It is the worst arranged theatre I was ever in."

"I am sorry," said Joyce, "you look tired."

"Hush — the orchestra —"

The curtain rose slowly, revealing the glare of the footlights and the vague cavernous darkness of the auditorium, seen shimmering, as they reclined on the stage, through the band of unburned gases above the jets.

The opening chorus began with its nodding-mandarin business, followed by eccentric evolutions. Then the tenor came on alone. He jostled Joyce who was standing near the entrance.

"Damn it, don't take up all the stage," he muttered irritably under cover of the radiant expression demanded by the business.

He broke into his song, the chorus lining the sides. Then two minor characters ap-

peared, and after some dialogue, interrupted by Chinese exclamations of delight on the part of the chorus, the latter danced off in pairs.

"I do call that cheek," said Miss Stevens, as soon as they had reached the wings, "why could n't he look where he was going to?"

"Yes, it was his fault," said Joyce.

"That 's the way with all these light tenors — simply eaten up with conceit. If I were you I 'd give him a piece of my mind and ask him what the something he meant by it."

"I have n't enough individuality here to make it worth while," replied Joyce with a shrug of the shoulders.

The girl did not quite understand, but she caught enough of his drift to perceive that he was not going to retaliate. Possibly she thought him a poor-spirited fellow. "Oh, well — if you like being insulted —" she said, turning away toward a group of girls.

Joyce did not attempt to remonstrate. What did it matter whether a coxcomb had cursed him? What did it matter, either, whether he had fallen in Miss Stevens's estimation? In fact, what did anything matter, so long as star-

vation was not staring you in the face, or your companion was not pointing at the trace of black arrows? He turned also and joined in desultory whispering with McKay and Blake. At the end of the first act, men and women went off at different sides to their dressing-rooms. It was only during a wait in the second act that he found himself next to Miss Stevens again.

"Are you going to see me home again to-night after the performance?" she asked.

"If you will allow me," replied Joyce.

"I 'm sorry I was short with you," she said, awkwardly.

"Oh, it was nothing."

The polite indifference in his tone rather piqued her. She was naturally a plain, anæmic girl and the heavy make-up of grease-paint did not render her more attractive at close quarters. The knowledge of this irritated her the more.

"You don't seem to care about anything."

"I don't much," said Joyce.

At that moment the leading lady came off the stage and passed by them as they stood leaning against the iron railings of the staircase. She was wearing the minimum of costume

allowed by Celestial etiquette, and looked very fresh and charming.

"Oh, you are Mr. Joyce, are n't you?" she said, pausing at the top of the stairs; and, as Joyce bowed, — "Some one told me you were a friend of Yvonne Latour's."

"Yes," said Joyce, "I have known her for a very long time."

"How is she? I have n't seen her for ages."

She moved down a couple of steps, so Joyce had to lean over the balustrade to reply.

"She 's a dear little creature. I used to know her while she was living with that wretch of a husband of hers," said the lady, looking up. "He 's dead, or something, is n't he?"

"Yes, thank goodness," said Joyce, with more warmth perhaps than he was aware of; for she smiled and replied: —

"You seem to look upon it as a personal favour on the part of Providence."

"I think it is a personal boon to all Madame Latour's friends."

"Oh, I am delighted," she said, with a touch of raillery. "If ever there was a marriage that ought to have been labelled 'made in heaven' that was one."

"Yes, it was a very cheap imitation of native goods," replied Joyce, with a smile.

"Well, if you were going to meet her soon, I should ask you to remember me to her; but as we are on a long tour — "

"I shall be writing shortly," he interposed.

"Then that will do. Good-night, Mr. Joyce."

She disappeared down the stairs. When Joyce turned round, he discovered that Miss Stevens had walked off, perhaps in dudgeon at having been neglected. Joyce felt sorry. She was the only girl with whom he cared to be on friendly terms outside the theatre, and who, accordingly, had manifested any interest in his doings. It would be a misfortune if she were offended. Meanwhile the late unexpected chat about Yvonne had been very pleasant. Miss Verrinder had been nice and frank, assuming from the first that he was a gentleman, and could be spoken to without restraint. Joyce felt the fillip to his spirits during the rest of the performance.

When it was over, he dressed as quickly as the crowded confusion of the dressing-room rendered possible, and refusing an invitation on the part of McKay to drink at the adjoining

public-house, went down the short street that led to the Parade, where he had arranged to meet Miss Stevens.

She did not keep him long waiting. He relieved her of a bulky parcel she was carrying, and, holding it under his arm, walked gravely by her side.

"I thought you said you were n't an amateur," she said suddenly.

"Neither am I. It 's my livelihood."

"Oh, yes — between you and starvation, I suppose."

"Just so," said Joyce.

"Could n't you do anything else?"

"I can't get anything else to do."

"Then how did you manage to come down in the world?"

"How do you know I have come down?" asked Joyce, amused at the catechism.

"Can't I see you were up once? Miss Verrinder would n't have talked to you like that if you had n't belonged to her set. And I have heard of Yvonne Latour. She does n't make friends with the likes of McKay and me and the rest of us. So you 're either an amateur come for the practice or the fun of the thing, or — "

"It's hugely funny, I assure you," he interrupted, "to live in a back-street bedroom — 'lodgings for respectable men' — on thirty shillings a week, and save out of that."

"Well, then you've come a cropper."

"Really, Miss Stevens," he replied drily, "it would be rather embarrassing to have to account to you for all my misdeeds."

"Oh, I don't want to hear 'em. Not I—I'm not that sort. But when I like a man, I like to know just what he is. That's all. Now my father was a butler, and my mother a housekeeper, and they used to let lodgings in Yarmouth. And they're dead now, and I shift for myself. Now you know all about me. I think I'd better carry that parcel."

She was rather defiant. Joyce could not understand her. Surely something more than inconsequent bad taste had prompted her to draw this distinction between their respective origins. But he was too self-centred to speculate deeply upon feminine problems. He hugged the parcel closer, and said: —

"Nonsense. The paper is torn and all the stuff will drop out."

"Oh, then I must carry it," she cried, in quite a different tone. But he refused gallantly.

"What's inside it?" he asked, glad to divert the conversation into less perplexing channels.

"It's a dress — the one I wear in the third act. Well, you can carry it. My head's splitting. And I'm ready to drop."

They had reached the end of the Parade. Their way lay at right angles through the town. It was a gusty, though warm night, and the cloud-racked sky and sea were dimly visible.

"Would you like to sit down for a few minutes?" he asked.

"Would you like it?"

Her white face was turned up earnestly toward his.

"It might do you good," he replied.

"No," she said abruptly, after a pause, "Let us get home."

They walked together in silence. Joyce's thoughts were far away. He parted from her at the door of her lodgings and went on slowly to his own.

He had accustomed himself quickly to the nomad life on tour, its mechanical regularity despite the weekly change of scene. Once, perhaps, a round like this among the large

provincial towns would have been filled with interests. But now it was empty. He tried in vain to whet his dull curiosity, by strolling through the streets and seeking to busy his mind with the industrial or municipal aspects, the art treasures, the historical monuments of the various towns. But all intellectual keenness seemed to have been blunted during those deadening years. His lonely walks were at best but an aimless killing of time. All the towns presented to him the same essential features: one busy thoroughfare, the theatre with its flaring bills, and a poverty-stricken side-street where his bedroom was situated. His life was singularly monotonous. The long hours of the day, given up to lounging in solitude, or reading what cheap literature his means would allow, were succeeded by the uninspiring, almost impersonal work at the theatre. All that was required of him was to sing his parts correctly, and to execute automatically the "business" in which he had been drilled. It was painfully easy. But he doubted within himself whether he had any dramatic aptitude. He could never divest himself of the self-conscious idea that he looked a fool in theatrical garb. The greer

robe and pigtail gave him the sense of being a spectacle for gods and men. His spirit was too crushed to look upon life humorously. Still, the great anxiety was lifted from his mind. It was a livelihood, secured for an indefinite time. The tour was booked a year ahead, and, as the outset proved "The Diamond Door" to be as great a provincial success as it had been a London one, there seemed no reason against a continuous run for three or four years. In the meantime, he might advance a step or two. But he did not care to contemplate the future. He was thankful for the dull, unruffled present. He was working again among honest men, reckoned as one himself. Could he dare hope for more?

At times he found himself half cynically content with his lot. At others, a yearning rose within him like a great pain to be able to look the world in the face without shrinking from its condemnation. A strange idea began to work in his brain; to win back by some great deed of sacrifice his self-honour and respect. But he knew himself to be a dreamer of dreams, of too sorry stuff for such stern action. He would go whither the wind drifted

him. Of this he thought as he walked home after parting with Annie Stevens.

He met her the next morning on the beach, a long way from the town, sitting, a lonely figure upon a great drain-pipe rising half above the sand. She was resting her chin upon her fingers, that grasped a crumpled copy of "Tit-Bits," and she was looking out to sea. Their eight weeks of pairing on the stage had brought to Joyce a feeling of companionship with her, which he did not have as regards the others. Besides, those who were not either domestic or commonplace, belonged to the flaxen-haired, large-eyed, tawdrily-dressed type so common in the lower ranks of the profession. Miss Stevens had a personality which, though unrefined, was at least her own, and he honestly liked her.

She gave a little start when she was aware of his presence, and a quick flush came into her cheeks. But he did not notice it. With a pleasant greeting he sat down by her side and talked of current trifles. At last she broke out suddenly.

"Oh, don't let 's talk 'shop.' I 'm sick of the piece and the theatre altogether."

"Oh, come, it is not so bad," said Joyce,

consolingly. "We both ought to be playing good parts, and having rosier prospects. But things might be very much worse."

He was feeling brighter this morning. Yvonne had written him a long, gossipy letter, full of encouragement and her own unconscious charm, thus lifting him on a little wave of cheerfulness. With a friend like Yvonne and daily bread, he ought to be thankful. As for Miss Stevens, he did not see what she had particularly to grumble at. If she had been beautiful or talented, she might have had reason to quarrel with her lot.

"Besides," he added after a pause. "Look what a lovely day it is!"

"So you think we ought to be quite happy?"

"Moderately so."

She was in a taciturn mood, and did not reply, but turned a little away from him and began to dig the sand with the toe of her boot. Suddenly she said, rather petulantly:—

"I wonder if you could ever love a woman."

He had grown accustomed to her late, discrete methods of conversation, so the question scarcely surprised him. He took off his hat, so as to enjoy the breeze, and rested both hands at his sides on the drain-pipe.

"I suppose I could if I tried," he said carelessly, "but I'm very much better as I am. Why do you ask?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know. I thought I'd say something. We were n't having exactly a rollicking time, you know."

This time the acerbity in her tone did strike him. Something had gone wrong with her. He bent forward so as to catch a sight of her averted face.

"What is the matter, Miss Stevens?" he asked concernedly. "You are not yourself. Could I be of any service to you?"

She did not reply. Her silence seemed an encouragement to press his sympathy. It was a new thing to be of help to a human being. He put his fingers on her sleeve and added: —

"Tell me."

She drew away her arm and started to her feet.

"Yes, I will tell you. I've been making a miserable little fool of myself. Let's go back."

Joyce rose and walked by her side.

"You are not by any chance embarrassed

in money matters?" he asked, in as delicate a tone as he could.

"Money!"

She looked at him incredulously for a moment, then broke into hysterical laughter.

"Money!" she repeated. "Oh, you are too comic for anything!"

CHAPTER VI

MELPOMENE

Two weeks passed and Joyce found himself in Hull. During the previous week Miss Stevens had lodged quite near to the theatre, and there had been no occasion for his escort after the performance. Besides, she had maintained a distant attitude toward him which precluded further offer of sympathy in her affairs. He was sorry for her; she seemed lonely, like himself, and, like himself, to have some inward suffering that made life bitter. He was glad, then, to find at Hull that they lodged in the same street, some distance away from the Theatre Royal, so that he could propose, as a natural thing, the resumption of their former habit. She had acquiesced readily on the Monday night, and they had met as a matter of course on the four succeeding evenings. Her late aloofness was followed by a more intimate and submissive manner. There

were no more defiant utterances and fits of petulance. She seemed anxious to atone for past irritability, and Joyce, vaguely remembering a spring-tide cynicism of his, that one must be astonished at nothing in a woman, received these advances kindly, and looked upon their friendly relations as consolidated.

He also found himself progressing in favour with the rest of the company. Several desultory chats with Miss Verrinder, the friend of Yvonne, had not only brightened the dulness of the theatre life, but also given him a little *prestige* among his colleagues. For there is a good deal of humanity in man, including the chorus of comic opera. So, such as it was, Joyce's contentment rose to high-level at Hull. He did not couple the town with Hell and Halifax in his litany of supplication, but, on the contrary, found it a not unpleasant place, which, moreover, was in process of undergoing a rare week of sunshine.

His favourite spot was the Corporation Pier, with its double deck and comfortable seats and view across the Humber. His well-worn clothes were in harmony with its frequenters, and he felt more at ease than on the Parade of a seaside resort thronged with well-dressed

people. Here he brought his book and pipe, read discursively, watched the shipping, fell into talk with seafaring men, who told him the tonnage of vessels and the ports from which they came. Often a great steamer performing the passenger service across the North Sea would come into the docks close by, and he would go and watch her land her passengers and cargo. The hurry and movement were welcome to him, breaking, as they did, the lethargy of the day. If the docks were quiet, there was always the mild excitement of witnessing the arrival of the Grimsby boat at the pier.

On Saturday morning this last incident had attracted him from his seat on the lower gallery to the little knot of expectant idlers gathered by the railing. The steamer was within a quarter of a mile, the churn of her paddles the only break visible in the sluggish water of the river. He stood leaning over, pipe in mouth, idly watching her draw near. When she was moored alongside and the gangway pushed on to the landing-stage below, he moved with the others to the head of the slope to watch the passengers ascend. Why he should particularly interest himself in the passage of humdrum

labourers, fishwives, artisans, and young women come to shop in Hull, he did not know. He watched them, with unspeculating gaze, pass hurrying by, until suddenly a pair of evil eyes looking straight into his own made him start back with a shiver of dismay.

Escape was impossible; in another moment the man was by his side.

"Hullo, old pal! Who would have thought of seeing you?"

Joyce did not take the dirty hand that was proffered. He stuck his own deep in his pockets, frowned at the man, and turned away. But the other followed.

"Look here, old pal, I don't call this a friendly lead — bust me if I do. You might pass the time of day with a bloke — especially as it is n't so long ago ——"

The man's voice was loud, the pier busy with people. The air seemed to Joyce filled with a thousand listening ears. His blood tingled with shame. He faced round with an angry look.

"What do you want with me?"

"Oh, don't take on, old pal," replied the other, in lower tones. "I ain't going to give you away — don't you fear. It 's only pleas-

ant to meet old pals again — in better circs. Ain't it?"

Joyce had always loathed him — a flabby, sallow, greasy-faced fellow, with blear eyes and a protruding under-lip. He had been sentenced for a foul offence against decency. Joyce's soul used to revolt at the sight of him as they sat on either side of the reeking tub washing up the cooking utensils in the prison kitchen. The hateful stench rose again to his nostrils now and turned his stomach.

"Can't you see I am going to have nothing to do with you?" he said angrily.

"Come, don't be hard on a bloke when he 's down," replied the man. "It ain't everyone that gets on their legs again when they comes out. I 've been out two months, and I have n't had a job yet. S'welp me! And there 's the wife and the kids starving. Give us a couple of quid to send to 'em and make 'em happy again. Just two thick uns."

Joyce stared at him, breathless with indignation at his impudence.

"I 'll see you damned first!" he cried fiercely.

"Well, make it ten bob, or five, or the price of a drink, old pal. You can't leave

an old fellow-boarder in distress, or the luck will turn agen you."

He leered up into Joyce's face, disclosing a jagged row of yellow teeth. But Joyce started forward and took him by the collar.

"If you try to blackmail me," said he, pointing to a policeman on the quay, "I 'll give you in charge. Just stay where you are and let me go my ways."

He released him and marched off. But the man did not attempt to follow. He slipped into a seat close by and sang out sarcastically: "If you 'll leave your address, I 'll send you a mourning card when the kids is dead!"

Joyce caught the words as he hurried down the stairs. When he had crossed the quay to the hotels, he looked up at the pier, and saw the man leaning over with a grin on his face. It was only when he reached his lodging that he breathed freely again.

What he had long expected had come to pass — recognition by a fellow-prisoner. It was a horrible experience. It might occur again and again indefinitely. He walked agitated up and down his poorly-furnished bedroom. Could he do nothing to guard against such

things in the future? If he could only disguise himself! Then he remembered that the moustache which might have served him as a slight protection against casual glances had been sacrificed to theatrical exigencies. He ground his teeth at the futility of the idea. And at intervals wrath rose up hot within him at the man's cool impudence. Two pounds — more than a week's salary — to be thrown away on swine like that! He laughed savagely at the thought.

He grew calm after a time, lay down on his bed and opened a book. But the face of the man, bringing with it scenes of a past in which they had been associated came between his eyes and the page.

"Anyhow, it's over," he exclaimed at last, with a determined effort to banish the memories. "And, thank God, it's Saturday, and I shall be in Leeds to-morrow."

To avoid the chance of meeting him in the streets, however, he stayed at home all day, sending round a note of excuse on the score of seediness to Miss Stevens, with whom he had arranged to take an afternoon stroll. On his way to the theatre he caught sight of the man standing by a gas-lamp at a street-corner

on the other side of the way. He hurried on, glad at his escape, for the glance of the man's eyes resting upon him was abhorrent.

For the first time since he had started on the tour the rough companionship of the dressing-room was a comfort and delight. Here were kindly words, welcoming faces, the pleasant familiarity of common avocation. He forgot the heat, and the crush, and the tomfool aspect the dressing had always presented. The place was home-like, familiar, sheltering. His costume, as he took it down from the peg, seemed like an old friend. The jolly voices of his companions rang gratefully in his ears. The disgust of the day faded into the memory of a nightmare. This was a reality — this hearty good-fellowship with uncontaminated men.

When he went out with them on to the stage, before the curtain rose, and met the ladies of the chorus, he greeted those that he liked with a newer sense of friendliness. Until then he had never been aware how pleasant it was to have Annie Stevens's head resting on his knee. He thanked God he was a criminal no longer — not as that other man was. Certainly Phariseeism is justifiable at times.

He was very kind to Miss Stevens all the evening during the waits, when they happened to be together. His apologies for having to put off their engagement met with her full acceptance. She was solicitous as to his health — asked him in her downright fashion whether he ate enough.

"You are a gentleman, you know, and not accustomed to poor people's ways and their privations."

"My dear," he replied, dropping for the first time into the old professional's mode of address. "I've gone through privations in my life that you have never dreamed of. This is clover — knee-deep."

And he believed it; thought, too, what a fool he had been to grumble at this honest, pleasant theatrical life. The reaction had rather excited him.

"I look upon myself as jolly well off here," he said. "And I eat like an ox, I assure you. Do you know, it's very good of you to take an interest in me?"

"Do you think so?" said the girl, with a little laugh, and turning away her head.

At the end of the first act a fresh pleasure awaited him. It was a night of surprising sen-

sations. The stage-manager called him into his room.

"Walker has been telegraphed for — wife very ill — and he won't be able to play on Monday. Do you think you could play his part till he comes back?"

"Rather!" said Joyce, delighted.

"You are the only one of the crowd that can sing worth a cent," said the stage-manager with a seasonable mixture of profanity. "I 'll pull you through. Perhaps he 's not coming back at all. One never knows. If he does n't and you go all right, there 's no reason why you should n't stick to it."

Walker spoke exactly four lines, sang once in a quartette and had a couplet solo. Otherwise he made himself useful in the chorus. But it was a part, his name was down in the bill. The value of the step, moral, pecuniary and professional was considerable. Joyce felt that his luck had turned at last. Here was the gate into the profession proper open to him.

The news soon spread through the company. A "call" for rehearsal on Monday morning for the chorus and those of the principals concerned in the change was posted up. He felt himself a person of some importance. McKay

congratulated him; and Blake, although he said, "You swells get all the fat," spoke by no means enviously. The others cracked jokes and suggested drinks all round, which, being sent for by Joyce, were consumed in the dressing-room. Annie Stevens squeezed his hand, during their dance together, and whispered a word of pleasure. He had no idea that so infinitesimal a success could have masqueraded as such a triumph. He longed to get back to his room to write it all to Yvonne.

At the stage-door, after the performance, he met Annie Stevens, who had hurried through her dressing.

"I 'm glad for your sake, but I 'm sorry for my own," she said, after they had walked a few steps.

"Why, what difference can it make to you?" asked Joyce laughing.

"I shall have to play and sing with somebody else."

"True. I was forgetting. Yes, it will seem funny. I shall miss you too."

"I don't believe you care one bit," said the girl.

To acquiesce would have been rude. He answered her with vague regrets. She inter-

rupted him with a laugh in which was the faintest note of scorn.

"Oh, you 're very glad to get rid of me, and the stupid kissing and everything. You won't have to give any one a Chinese kiss now. And they were very Chinese, you know."

"An English kiss would have been out of the picture," said Joyce.

"We 're not in the picture now," she said softly.

Joyce felt that he was doing something very foolish, perhaps dangerous. He had never had the remotest fancy for allowing his companionship with her to degenerate into a flirtation. But what could he do? He bent down and kissed her.

There was an awkward silence for a few yards, which she broke at last in her irrelevant way.

"I should so like a glass of port wine to-night."

"So should I," said Joyce, cheerfully. "Or something like it. We 'll go into the Crown yonder."

Two or three times before they had had a glass together on their way home. To-night, therefore, the suggestion seemed natural. They entered the private bar of the public-house,

and Joyce ordered the liquors. Only one young man was there, reading a sporting paper on a high stool. It was a quiet place, with the view beyond the counter down the bar cut off by a ground-glass screen, through a low space under which the customers were served.

Joyce pushed the port wine smilingly to Miss Stevens, and, with his back to the door, was pouring some water into his whisky, when a voice sounded in his ear, causing him to start violently and flood the counter.

"I say, old pal, *are* you goin' to help a poor feller?"

The man was standing behind him, the leer upon his greasy face. Joyce had been blissfully unaware that he had dogged his steps from that street corner to the stage-door of the theatre, and from the stage-door hither. The sight of him was a stroke of cold terror.

"Go away. I'll give you in charge," he stammered, losing his head for the moment.

Annie Stevens clutched his arm.

"Who is this beastly man?" she said.

"Only an old pal, miss," said the man, edging towards the door. "We was in quod many months together, and now he won't give me 'arf a crown to keep me from starving."

"By God!" cried Joyce, making a sudden dash at him.

But the man was too quick; he had secured his retreat, and when Joyce reached the pavement — the house was at a corner of cross roads — he could not catch the fall of his footsteps. The man had vanished into the night, and pursuit was hopeless. It had all passed with the sudden unexpectedness of a dream. Joyce put his hand to his forehead and tried to think. He could scarcely realise exactly what had happened. He seemed to be enveloped with tiny tingling waves that drew his skin tight like a drum for his heart to beat against. He turned, and saw Annie Stevens standing by his side, in the light of the public-house, with anger on her face.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" she asked brusquely.

"Do you believe that man?" said Joyce, the words coming painfully.

Their lack of conviction damned him. The girl drew back a step, and looked at him with revulsion in her eyes.

"You can't deny it! I see that you can't. You 've just come out of prison."

If the world had been at his feet he could

not have lied convincingly at that moment. He could only stare at her haggardly and rack his brains for words that would not come. She moved away instinctively from the public glare and turned down the dark street that led toward their destination.

"It's a lie," he said desperately, striding to her side.

"No it isn't. It's truth. I read it on your face. That's why you've come down in the world — that's why you live by yourself — that's why you didn't dare come out this afternoon — and that's where you've known all those privations I never dreamed of. It's no good telling lies."

"Well, it's true," said Joyce. "And I've paid the penalty for my folly ten times over Forget all this, Annie, for God's sake."

"Go away!" she cried, walking faster. "I don't want to see you again. Oh, to think of it makes me sick! Go away, do!"

But he followed her imploringly. He was at her mercy.

"I don't care what you think of me," he said. "I will keep out of your way as much as you like. Only, a word from you would ruin me. Keep my story secret, like an hon-

ourable woman. I have done nothing to you."

"Yes, you have!" she cried, stopping short and facing him. "You have dared to kiss me. Oh — a pretty fine gentleman you are — with your patronising superior ways — and I thinking myself an ignorant, common girl, not good enough for you! What were you? A pick-pocket?"

"You abuse me as if I were one," said Joyce, bitterly. "Good-night, Miss Stevens. I shall not molest you any further." He motioned to her with his hand to pass on in front. She regarded him for a moment stonily, and then, with a short exclamation of disgust, swung round sharply and proceeded at a hurried pace down the dismal, ill-lighted street. Joyce watched her until she was swallowed up in the darkness, and had obtained sufficient start for him to follow in her footsteps without fear of overtaking her.

But as he walked along, the dread of her indignation seized him. If only he could say another word to her before the morning, he might secure her pity and her silence. The idea grew more and more insistent, until he could bear it no longer. He started off at

a run, at first on the pavement of the quiet side street, and then in the roadway by the kerb of the busier thoroughfare into which it led, and regardless of jostling and oaths, continued his way, until he succeeded in catching her up just as she was inserting the latchkey into her door.

"Annie," he cried, his chest heaving painfully from the exertion of running. "Promise me you won't breathe a word of this to any one."

She let herself in deliberately and stood in the dark passage.

"I'll promise nothing. I never want to set my eyes on you again!"

And then she slammed the door in his face.

He turned away sick at heart, and went to his own lodging. Resentment at her coarse anger, and speculation as to the motives of the sudden change from friendliness to hatred were things that did not come to him till afterwards. Sufficient for the night was the despair of the sleepless hours, the dread of the girl's tongue, and the anguish of tottering hopes. He did not write to Yvonne. The little triumph of the evening seemed like a gay pagoda struck by lightning.

CHAPTER VII

A FORLORN HOPE

At the railway station the next afternoon he found most of the company already assembled on the platform. Curious glances were cast upon him as he appeared; there were nudgings and whisperings; some giggling on the part of the chorus girls standing round Annie Stevens, who was looking paler and more defiant than usual. A group of his colleagues melted away at his approach. He saw at once what had happened. The fears that had haunted him all the night and all that day were realised. He felt his face and lips grow white, and his limbs trembled. With an instinctive remnant of self-assertion, he went up to Blake, who was standing by one of the reserved carriages. It seemed a long time before he could speak. At last he asked him stupidly at what time the train started.

"Four forty," said Blake, curtly.

"And when do we get to Leeds?"

"How the devil should I know? If you want to know, there's the guard. Ask him."

With which he moved away and joined two or three others a few steps off. Joyce felt too sick with misery to resent the rudeness. He walked a short distance along the train, and seeing one of his colleagues in a compartment, concluded that it was reserved for the chorus-men and crept into the far corner, where he sat down, holding a newspaper before his face.

The compartment filled and the train started. At first there was a general constraint in the talk. Then a game at nap was instituted; but no one spoke to Joyce. At Selby there was over an hour's wait. With a feeling that he must be alone at any cost, he rushed out of the station, and, avoiding the town, wandered aimlessly through lanes and fields until it was time to return. He was too dazed and overwhelmed by this sudden blow to think coherently. Now it was the girl's deliberate cruelty that passed his comprehension; now the sickening shame at being known in his true colours to a whole society burned into his flesh. Only one thought stood out from the rest in lurid clearness — the impossibility of his continuing the tour. Even if the management took no

notice of the discovery, he felt he would rather starve to death in a hole than live through that hell of daily aversion and contempt. To return to the company and travel with them as far as Leeds was pain enough. He would face that, however, and then —

It was gathering dusk when he arrived at the station, just in time to see the guard about to wave the green flag. The handle of the compartment was in his grasp when he heard McKay say: —

"Well, because a fellow's happened to be in quod, that doesn't mean he's likely to sneak your watches out of the dressing-room!"

He opened the door and entered amid a dead silence, which lasted, with few interruptions, all the rest of the journey. Joyce looked round at his seven companions, with an awful sense of isolation. Only four-and-twenty hours before he had loved them for their warm good-fellowship. He was wrung with the pity of it. McKay's words still sounded in his ear. They were horrible enough, but it was evident they were meant in his defence. Once he met his glance, and read in it a signal of kind intent. But the others steadily looked another way when his eye fell upon them.

When they left the train at Leeds, McKay touched him on the shoulder and drew him apart from the hurrying stream of passengers and porters.

"What's all this yarn that Annie Stevens has been telling us?"

"Oh, it's true enough," replied Joyce, wearily.

"The damned little hell-cat," said McKay. "I told you to keep clear of women."

"It was bound to come out. One of you fellows might just as well have been with me in the pub last night."

"Do you think a MAN would have given you away like this?" asked McKay, with great scorn.

"I've come to the conclusion that anything's possible in this infernal world," said Joyce, bitterly. "I suppose the whole crowd are against me."

"Well, there is a bit of feeling, certainly," replied McKay, in an embarrassed tone. "And maybe it won't be very pleasant for you. They all talk as if they were plaster of Paris saints, — and, dash it all — they made me sick; so I thought I'd come and say I'd stand by you."

"Thank you, McKay," said Joyce, touched. "You are a good sort. But I sha'n't ask you. I am not going on with the tour."

"I think you 're just as well out of it, to tell you the truth," said McKay. Then his anger against Annie Stevens broke out again in an unequivocal epithet.

"The little ——," he said.

"I suppose it is horrible in a woman's eyes," said Joyce, moving with McKay toward the crowd round the luggage-van. "But I can't see why she should hate me like this, all of a sudden, and wish to ruin me."

"Can't you? It 's pretty plain."

"No," said Joyce. "We have always been the best of friends."

"Friends? You don't mean to say you did n't know she was gone on you — clean gone, all off her chump? No one liked to chaff you about it, because you have an infernal sarcastic way of scoring off fellows. But, Gawd! The way she used to look at you was enough to make a man sick!"

"Do you mean she was in love with me?" asked Joyce, falteringly, as the whole situation of affairs, past and present, began to dawn upon him.

"Well, rather," said McKay, with a chuckle. "What do you think?"

Several of the company were still around the pile of luggage by the van, claiming their things and waiting for porters. Standing on one side was Annie Stevens, and, as it happened, Joyce recognised his Gladstone bag lying at her feet. He went and picked it up, and was going off silently with it, when he felt her touch on his arm. Dim as the light was, he could see that her face was haggard and drawn. She met his stern gaze beseechingly.

"For God's sake, forgive me," she whispered.

"You have played too much havoc with my life," replied Joyce coldly.

"I shall kill myself," said the girl.

"Some people are better dead," said Joyce, turning away, bag in hand.

On the platform beyond the barriers he met McKay again.

"Good-bye, McKay," he said. "I have only two friends in the world who know my story, and you are one."

"Good-bye, old man," said McKay. "Better luck next time."

They shook hands and parted, McKay to join his friend Blake at the lodgings they had secured already, Joyce to put up for the night at the first cheap hotel he could find.

The next day he was in London again, in his old room in Pimlico — a broken-hearted, broken-spirited man. For two days he remained in a state of stupid misery, yearning for the life he had just abandoned; tortured, too, by reproaches for his cowardice. Why had he not faced the ignominy, and tried to live it down? Then the conviction of the hopelessness of the attempt was forced upon him. Even if he had continued in the profession, his name would soon have been known throughout it as the ex-convict, — and he had been in it long enough to perceive how narrow the theatrical circle is, — and all hope of advancement would have been worse than futile. On the third day he went to see Yvonne, but she had just gone out of town. The porter at the flat did not know how long she would be away. She was at Fulminster. Her letters were forwarded there. So Joyce wrote her a short note, explaining his situation, and set himself to wait patiently for her coming.

But on that evening, out of sheer weariness and longing for human companionship, he turned into his old haunt, the billiard-room in Westminster. It seemed just the same as on the last evening he had been there. The occupants of the divan might never have moved from that night to this. His appearance was greeted with incurious, uninterested nods. The only one that offered his hand was Noakes, who was sitting at the end, still in his Chesterfield overcoat and old curly silk hat, but looking more woe-begone and pallid than ever. There was a touch of pain, too, in his usually expressionless pale-blue eyes. Joyce took his seat next to him and bent forward, elbows on knees and chin resting in his hands.

"You have been absent from town?" asked Noakes, in his precise, toneless way.

Joyce nodded, with a murmur of assent.

"I, too, have not been here lately."

"Press of literary work?" asked Joyce, without looking up.

The other did not notice the shade of sarcasm. He passed his hand across his eyes and sighed.

"I have given it up."

"Have you come into a fortune?"

"No. I have had the deadliest misfortune that can befall a man."

Something genuinely tragic in his tone made Joyce start up from his dejected attitude and look at his neighbour.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I did not know."

"Of course not; no one does. At least, no one I can repose any confidence in."

There was an air of dignity in this oddly attired figure, with the ludicrous silk hat above the black mutton-chop whiskers and bushy white hair, and yet a mute appeal for sympathy which Joyce could not but perceive.

"I, too, have been hard hit lately," he said, in a low voice.

"Ah, not like me," said the other, turning round in his seat, so that his words should reach only Joyce's ear. "Until three weeks ago I had a wife and child. No man ever loved as I did. I worked for them till my brain almost gave way — fifteen hours a day, week after week, starved myself for them, denied myself the clothes on my back. Now I have them no longer. Life is valueless to me."

"Are they — dead?" asked Joyce.

"No. Gone off with the lodger on the first floor," replied Noakes, solemnly.

Joyce remained silent. What could he say? He looked sympathetic. Noakes blew his nose in a dirty piece of calico with frayed edges that courtesy called a pocket-handkerchief, and continued: —

"So my life is wrecked. My imagination is darkened and I can write no more. I have given up my literary ambitions. It is not worth while writing penny bloods at half a crown a thousand for one's own support."

"What are you going to do then?" asked Joyce, interested in the quaint creature.

"I am going abroad. I have come here perhaps for the last time. On the day after to-morrow I sail for South Africa."

Was it a sudden inspiration? Was it the coming to a head of vague resolutions, despairs, workings, the final word of a destiny driving him from England? Was it a sudden sense of protecting brotherhood towards this forlorn, tragic scarecrow of a man? Joyce never knew. Possibly it was all bursting upon his soul at once. Springing to his feet, he held out his hand to Noakes.

"By all that's holy, I'll come with you!" he cried, in a strange voice.

The other, after some hesitation, took his hand and looked at him pathetically.

"Are you in earnest?"

"In dead earnest."

"I am going in the very cheapest possible manner."

"So am I."

"I am going, with a few pounds I have scraped together, to try my luck."

"The same with me. It can't be worse than England; starvation is certain here. Come, say, honour bright — will you be glad of me as a companion — as a friend if you like? I am a lonely bit of driftwood like yourself."

Then Noakes rose to his feet and this time squeezed Joyce's hand and his pale eyes glistened.

"I'll swear to be your friend in peace and in danger," he said, in his quaint phraseology. "And I thank the God of all mercies for sending you to me in my hour of need."

"All right," said Joyce. "And now let us have some whisky, and talk over details."

And so, in that dingy billiard-room, un-

known to the moulting Bohemians huddled up in somnolent attitudes close by on the divan, and unheeded by the shirt-sleeved men passing around the table intent on their game, was struck the strangest bargain of a friendship ever made between two outcast men; a friendship that was to last through want and sickness and despair and hope, and to leave behind it the ineffaceable stamp of nobler feeling.

But at first there was much admixture of cynicism on Joyce's side. He laughed aloud, in the bitterness of his heart, at the object he had taken for his bosom friend. It was only later, when he learned the patient, dog-like devotion of the man, that he felt humbled and ashamed at these beginnings.

With a draft on a Cape Town bank for the remainder of his capital, and a last regretful letter from Yvonne in his pocket, he left Southampton. And as they steamed down Channel, in the mizzling rain of a grey November day, he leaned over the taffrail and stared at the land of his brilliant hopes, his crime, his punishment, his struggles and his dishonour, with a man's agony of unshed tears.

He was going to begin life anew in a strange undesired country; hopeless, aimless, friendless

save for that useless creature who was pacing up and down the deck behind him, still in his ridiculous headgear. He had made no plans. The future to him when he should land at Cape Town was as unknown — as it is to any of the sons of men, did we but realise it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CANON'S ANGEL

WHILE Joyce was straining his eyes through the darkness for the last sight of land and eating out his heart in bitter regrets, Yvonne was busily engaged at Fulminster in rehearsing for the next day's concert. She had spent four days at Fulminster, the guest of Mrs. Winstanley, and found herself somewhat lost among the very decorous society of which Canon Chisely was a leading member. And while she was scanning the social heavens in half pathetic search of her bearings, Joyce's letters had arrived, with their tidings of catastrophe and exile. So, while there was a smile on her lip for the Canon and his friends, there was a tear in her eye for Joyce. His humiliation and her failure as fairy godmother brought her a pang of disappointment. She felt very tenderly towards Joyce. In her imagination, too, Africa was a dreadful place, made up of deserts, lions, and ferocious negroes in a state of nudity.

If she had seen him before he started, she might have dissuaded him from encountering such discomforts. She thought of this tearfully in the intervals that Fulminster affairs allowed her for reflection.

She was staying with Mrs. Winstanley. Now Mrs. Winstanley was the leading social authority in Fulminster. She was a distant cousin of Canon Chisely. In fact, she was an infinite number of irreproachable things. Mothers came to her as a matrimonial oracle. The Mayor consulted her on ticklish questions of civic etiquette. The affairs of the parish were in her hands. Although she inhabited a well-appointed house of her own, she superintended the domestic arrangements of the Rectory; and performed all the duties of hostess for her cousin when he entertained. Thus, parochially and socially she was invaluable to the Canon — his right-hand woman, one who could share his dignity, and, by so doing, add to its impressiveness. If he had been called upon to write her epitaph, he would have carved upon the stone, "Here lies a woman of sense." Now, when a responsibly placed and grave bachelor of three-and-forty holds that opinion of a woman of his own years,

and consults her in all his concerns, the result is not difficult to imagine. Cousin Emmeline ruled the Rectory, with exquisite tact it is true — for if there was one of her peculiar and original virtues of which she made a speciality, it was tact — but yet her influence was paramount.

When the Canon had come to her with a request to invite Madame Yvonne Latour to stay with her, she had elevated polite eyebrows.

"Whoever heard of such a thing!"

"It seems simple," said the Canon. "I can't invite her to my own house, so I beg you to invite her to yours."

"You are not going to do this for all the professionals engaged at the festival?"

"Of course not," answered the Canon; "who is suggesting anything so absurd?"

"Then why make an exception of Madame Latour, who is not even singing the leading parts?"

"She is very delicate and requires comforts," he replied. "If she is not taken care of, she may not be able to sing at all. Besides, it is my particular desire, Emmeline. I assume the privilege of expressing it to you."

"I take it she is a very great friend of yours?"

"A very great friend," said the Canon.

Mrs. Winstanley reviewed many unpleasant possibilities. Certain weaknesses becoming apparent in her own impregnable position strongly tempted her to refuse. She bit her lip and looked at her manicured finger-nails.

"Come, you 're a woman of sense," added the Canon, after a pause.

The tribute turned the tide of her judgment. She was a woman of sense. How absurd of her to have forgotten. An ironical smile played on her lips and lurked in her steel-grey eyes.

"You want to present Madame Latour to Fulminster society, Everard, with whatever advantages may be attached to my chaperonage?"

"Precisely," said the Canon.

"Well, I will send the invitation. But will she accept it?"

"I 'll see about that," he replied briskly. "I am deeply indebted to you, Emmeline."

She smiled, shook hands and followed him, with a word of parting, to the door. Then as soon as it was shut upon him, she stamped her

foot and walked across the room, with an exclamation of impatience.

"I wonder what kind of a fool he is going to make of himself!"

She soon saw. One is not a woman of sense for nothing. On the eve of the Festival, which was being held for the purpose of raising funds for the restoration of the old Abbey church, of which the Canon was rector, he gave a consecrating dinner-party.

The Bishop of the diocese, who was staying at the Rectory, was there; Sir Joshua and Lady Santyre, and others of the high and solemn world of Fulminster. Yet the Canon, with a high-bred tact, delicately conveyed the impression that Madame Latour was the guest of the evening. Mrs. Winstanley kept eyes and ears on the alert. There was much talk of the Festival. On the morrow the "Elijah" was to be given, with Madame Latour in the contralto part. The Canon was solicitous as to her voice, beamed with pleasure when she offered, in her sweet, simple way to sing to his guests, and stood behind her as she sung, with what, in Mrs. Winstanley's eyes, appeared an exasperating expression of fatuity.

A little later in the evening, a young girl,

Sophia Wilmington, went up to him with the charming insolence of youth.

"Why did n't you tell us she was so sweet? I 've fallen head over ears in love with her."

The Canon smiled, bowed, and delivered himself of this extraordinary speech: —

"My dear Sophia, next to falling in love with me, myself, you could not give me greater pleasure."

"She is so lovely," said the girl.

"A chance for a medallion," said the Canon. Miss Wilmington had a pretty taste in medallion painting.

"Oh, I could n't get her colouring; but I should love to try — and her voice. To me, any one with a gift like that seems above ordinary mortals. You see I am quite ready to worship your angel."

"My angel?" said the Canon, sharply.

Mrs. Winstanley, who was close by, discussing the Engadine with the Bishop, did not lose a word of the above conversation. At his last exclamation, she shot a swift side glance which caught the momentary confusion and flush on the Canon's face. She was quite certain now of the sort of fool he was going to make of himself.

Meanwhile, the girl broke into a gay laugh.

"It did sound funny. I meant the angel in the 'Elijah.'"

"Oh," said the Canon, "I was forgetting the 'Elijah.'"

Mrs. Winstanley resolved at least to say a warning word. Before she left, she managed to have a few words with him.

"I hope you are keeping your eyes very wide open, Everard," she said, in a whisper.

The Canon took her literally and so regarded her. But she smiled and put her hand on his sleeve.

"She is quite charming and all of that, I grant. But she is very much deeper than she looks."

"Really, my dear Emmeline—" he began, drawing himself up.

"Tut! my dear friend; don't be offended. You have called me a wise woman so often that I believe I am one. Well, trust a wise woman, and look before you leap."

"I am not in the habit of leaping, Emmeline," said the Canon, stiffly.

Mrs. Winstanley laughed, as if she had a sense of humour; and in a few minutes was driving Yvonne homewards in her snug brougham.

But the Canon, after he had performed his last duties as host towards his right reverend guest, sought the great leathern armchair before his study fire and lit a cigar. Emmeline's words had disturbed him. That is the worst of keeping a consultant cousin — a woman of sense. Her advice *may* save you from months of regret, but it is sure to cause you bad quarters of an hour. You remember the woman and disregard the sense on such occasions; or *vice versa*. Hitherto Emmeline had been infallible. The fact annoyed him, and he let his cigar die out, another irritation. At last he rose impatiently, and going to a violin-case, drew from it a favourite Guarnerius fiddle, tenderly wrapped in a silk handkerchief. And then, having put on the *sourdine*, so as not to disturb right reverend slumbers, he played "O, rest in the Lord," with considerable taste and execution.

Perhaps it is well that Mrs. Winstanley did not hear him.

The concert began at three o'clock. The new Town Hall was packed from ceiling to floor. Canon Chisely stood up by his seat near the platform and looked around at the

great mass of the audience, which included the flower and influence of the county, and then, turning, scanned the serried hedgerow of the orchestra, the crowding terraces of the choir, and the thin line of professionals in front, among whom Yvonne's tiny figure had just come to make a spot of grace; and he felt a glow of pride. It was all his doing. The dream of many years was in process of being realised — the completion of the Abbey Restoration Fund. Moreover, he had succeeded in developing his first conception of an unambitious concert into a musical event, to be chronicled by critics from the London dailies. He had other reasons, too, for satisfaction, neither professional nor æsthetic.

Yvonne was feeling fluttered and happy. Fluttered, because it was an important engagement. There are very few chances, even for a real contralto, in oratorio music, and her voice was more mezzo. Hitherto she had contented herself with the scraps. If she had known that the "Elijah" had been deliberately selected because it was the one oratorio in which the contralto part not only suited her voice perfectly, but also rivalled the soprano in importance, the fluttering would have

been intensified by perplexity. And she was happy, because all the world was smiling on her, particularly Geraldine Vicary and Vandeleur, with whom she was in immediate converse. Vandeleur had been engaged long since by the Canon for the name-part, partly on account of his magnificent bass voice, and partly to please Yvonne. Geraldine Vicary had stepped into a gap caused by the withdrawal of a more celebrated soprano at the last moment. Yvonne was smiling brightly upon Vandeleur. She liked him. He had made no subsequent reference to his declaration of love, and Yvonne, with her facile temperament, had almost forgotten the circumstance. Besides, he had gone back to his old allegiance to Geraldine, which pleased Yvonne greatly.

The conductor stepped to his stand and tapped with his baton. Silence succeeded the buzz of talk and the din of the tuning of fiddles. Three chords from the orchestra, and Vandeleur sang the introduction; the overture, the opening chorus, and then Yvonne took up her part. Singing was her life. After the first bar, she sang spontaneously, like the birds, free from nervousness

or self-consciousness. And during her waits the sublime music absorbed her senses. It swept on through its themes of despair, renunciation, revelation, and promise; through all its vivid contrasts — the great trumpet voice of the prophet, the rolling mass of sound of the chorus, the vibrating notes of the messenger — "Hear ye, Israel; hear what the Lord speaketh" — the calm, sweet voice of the angel, telling of peace.

The Canon listened through all with the ear of a musician and the heart of a religious man. But there was a chord in his nature that remained untouched when Yvonne was not singing, and quivered strangely when her voice was raised. It was so pathetically weak, so different in quality from Geraldine Vicary's powerful soprano, apparently so incapable of filling that vast hall; and yet so true, so exquisitely modulated that every note rang clear to the farthest gallery. The man forgot his three-and-forty years, the strange mingling of worldly wisdom and priestly dignity by which most of his judgments were formed, and he identified the woman with the voice, pure, angelic, irresistibly lovable.

He turned to his neighbour, Mrs. Winstan-

ley, after the "O, rest in the Lord," his eyes glistening, and whispered, —

"What do you think?"

"An unqualified success, Everard."

"I am so glad."

"You deserve every congratulation."

"Thanks, from my heart, Emmeline."

"The Obadiah man is delightful."

He looked blankly at her, unable to read what lay behind those calm, grey eyes. Then a great comfort fell upon him. The woman of sense had manifested a lack of intuition that could be called by no other name than stupidity. He hugged his knee, delighted. But he made no more references to Yvonne.

The silence following the crash of the last "Amen," announced the end. It woke him from a dream. He started to his feet with the impulse to seek Yvonne on the platform, but he was immediately hemmed in by a circle of congratulatory friends. As soon as he obtained breathing space, he turned round, to find that she had withdrawn to the ladies' dressing-room to put on her things. The hall cleared rapidly. Mrs. Winstanley waited for Yvonne, who did not come at once, having a flood of things to tell to Geraldine. The Canon

grew impatient. It was getting late, and he had to drive the Bishop home in time to dress for dinner at a great house some distance away. It would be his only chance of seeing Yvonne that evening. At last she came through the side-door and down the platform with Miss Vicary. He advanced to assist them at the steps, and then, after a few courteous words of thanks to Geraldine, who walked on unconcernedly toward the waiting group, found himself alone with Yvonne.

She wore high-standing fur at her throat and a tiny fur toque in the mass of dark hair, and she looked very winsome. Foolish speeches ran in his grave head, but he could not formulate them.

"I hope you are not very tired," he said, with dignified lameness, pacing by her side, his hands behind his back.

"Not very. My throat is a bit stiff, but that will go off. Well, was I all right?"

"My dear child—" began the Canon, stopping abruptly.

"I was afraid I might let the piece down, you know," she said, with a serene smile. "I am not a great vocalist, like Miss Vicary."

"Don't speak like that," he said, awkwardly.

"Besides, your voice has a charm that hers can never have."

"So you are quite pleased with me?" She looked up at him with such trustful simplicity that his rather stern face grew tender with a smile. It seemed as if a glimpse of her true nature was revealed to him.

"You are like a child-angel, asking if it has been good."

"Oh, what a sweet, pretty thing to say!" cried Yvonne, gaily. "I shall always remember it, Canon Chisely. Now I know I sang nicely. And, you know, it 's almost like being in heaven to sing that part."

"You called us all there to you," said the Canon.

Yvonne blushed, pleased to her heart by the sincerity of the compliment. Coming from Canon Chisely, it had singular force. There was an air of strength and dignity about his broad shoulders, his strongly-marked, thoughtful face, and his grave, yet kindly manner, that had always set him apart, in her estimation, from the other men with whom she came into contact. She never included him in her generalisations upon men and their strange ways. His profession and position, as well as his

personality, put him into a category where her unremembered father, and Mr. Gladstone, and the great throat-surgeon whom she had once consulted, vaguely figured. She was always conscious of being on her very best behaviour while talking to him.

The Canon glanced at his friends. They were conversing animatedly, as if in no great hurry to depart. So he leant back against the platform and lingered a while with Yvonne.

"You must take care not to catch cold," he said, after a while. "I believe it's a horrid evening."

"Oh, don't fear. I shall be all right to-morrow," said Yvonne.

"I am not thinking of to-morrow at all, though any hitch then would be a misfortune, certainly. I am anxious about yourself. Your throat is already relaxed."

"You must n't spoil me, Canon Chisely. I am used to going out in all kinds of weather. I have to, you know."

"I wish you had n't. You are far too fragile."

"Oh, I am stronger than I look. I am tough — really."

She brought out the incongruous epithet

so prettily that he put back his head and laughed.

"If I had any authority over you, you should not play tricks with yourself," he said, in grave playfulness.

"But you have a great deal of authority over me. I should never dream of disobeying you."

He leaned his body forward, his hands resting on the platform edge behind him, and looked at her earnestly.

"Do you think so much of me as that?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Why, of course, I think everything of you," replied Yvonne, innocently. "Don't you know that?"

An answer was on his lips, but, happening to look round, he caught Mrs. Winstanley's ironical glance, an off-switch to sentiment. He stroked a grizzling whisker and drew himself up.

"I must n't keep the Bishop waiting," he said.

"Nor I, Mrs. Winstanley."

They joined the group, where Yvonne received her congratulations and compliments with childish pleasure. In a few moments

they separated, and the Canon drove off, regarding the Bishop by his side with uncanonical feelings.

Late that evening Vandeleur was smoking a cigarette in Miss Vicary's hotel sitting-room. As Yvonne's friends, they had been dining with Mrs. Winstanley. Vandeleur was charmed with her urbanity, and sang her praises with Celtic hyperbole.

"I should n't trust her further than I could see her," said Geraldine. "She hangs up her smile every night on her dressing-table."

"Just hear a woman, now," said the Irishman.

"Yes, just hear a woman," retorted Geraldine, sarcastically. "I suppose you think she loves Yvonne, don't you?"

"Of course I do. I 'm sure she 's thinking how sweet she is this very minute."

"She would like to be poisoning Yvonne this very minute."

"Well, I 'm blest!" exclaimed Vandeleur, letting the match die out with which he was preparing to light a fresh cigarette. "It takes a woman to imagine gratuitous devilry!"

"And it takes a man to absorb himself in his dinner to the besotting of his intelligence!

But I have eyes. And a logical mind — don't tell me I have n't. Now, hitherto, Mrs. Winstanley seems to have been the central figure in this wretched little provincial society. Who is, at the present moment?"

"Sure, it 's yourself, Geraldine — the great soprano from London."

She did not condescend to notice the flattery.

"It 's Yvonne. I bet you she 's the most-talked-of person in Fulminster this evening. And Mrs. Winstanley the sickest. Oh, how dull men are! What is all this Festival, really, but the apotheosis of Yvonne?"

"It 's the canonisation of Yvonne, I should say," remarked Vandeleur, drily.

Miss Vicary's expression relaxed, and she leaned back in her chair.

"You 're not such a fool, after all, Van."

"So I 've been told before," he replied, with a chuckle. "Anyhow, it will be a splendid thing for the dear child."

"Oh, how can it be? I have no patience with you!"

"That 's obvious," said Vandeleur.

"Yvonne would give any man her head, if he whimpered or clamoured for it," continued

Geraldine, rising to her feet, "and then tell you in her pathetic way, 'but he wanted it so, dear.' And there is n't a man living who could be good enough to Yvonne!"

"There I agree with you," said Vandeleur.

Meanwhile, Yvonne was going to sleep, quite unconscious of the facts that had aroused Miss Vicary's indignation. The memory of the artistic triumph of the day and the Canon's generous praise lingered pleasantly around her pillow. But if there was any one man to whom her thoughts were tenderly given, it was the unhappy friend of her girlhood, who was then speeding into exile over the bleak autumn seas.

CHAPTER IX

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

If genius is mad, sensitiveness degenerate, and emotionality neurotic, and if heredity is the determining principle in the causation of character, comparative psychology enables us to account for many things. On these lines it could fairly be argued that one family taint of neurosis, manifesting itself diversely, had driven Stephen Chisely to the gaol and brought his cousin, the Canon, to the feet of Yvonne. Though there may be fallacies in the premises, there is, however, a certain plausibility in the deduction. Through both men ran a vein of artistic feeling carrying with it a perception of the beautiful and an impulse toward its attainment. This malady of sensitiveness — to speak by the book — had carried Stephen beyond the bounds of moral principle. It prevailed at times over Canon Chisely's natural austerity and hardness. If in the one case it had been a curse, in the other it was a blessing.

In politics a Tory, in social attitude proud of caste, in creed a rigid Anglican, in morals conventional, in affairs a man of cold, crystalline judgment, he had few of the undegenerate qualities that make for lovableness of character. The æsthetic sense, deeply spreading, was the redeeming vice of a sternly virtuous man. It was his social salvation, his vehicle of happiness, his bond of sympathy with his fellow-creatures.

The beauty of Yvonne's voice had attracted him toward her, years before — afterwards, the beauty of her face. But it was not until the conception of her nature's beauty, idealised by he knew not what artistry within him from voice and face and simple thoughts and acts, arose within his mind, that he became conscious of deeper feelings. At first it seemed as if he had disintegrated the soul of his favourite Greuze — fathomed the unplumbed innocence of its eyes as its hand closes over the apple — and was regarding it with a poet's wonder. But then his sterner nature asserted itself, restoring mental equilibrium. He realised that his feelings for her were what men call love, and soberly he thought of marriage.

He had often, previously, considered the advantages of matrimony. It was an honour-

able estate, becoming to his position, involving parental responsibilities which, for God's greater glory, it behoved a man of his calibre to seek. The wife he had contemplated was to be a woman of culture, reserve, high principle, who could grace his table, aid him in spiritual affairs, and bear him worthy offspring. He was called upon now to reorganise his conceptions. It is true that his idea of the advantages of the married state was unaffected, save by the addition of one undreamed of — the sunshine of a sweet woman's face in his cold home. But the disparity between the ideal woman and the real one was alarming. Socially, parentally, spiritually, was Yvonne the woman to hold the high office of his wife? He gave the matter months of anxious reflection. He was marrying at leisure, certainly, he thought grimly; would he repent in haste? At length his love for Yvonne wove itself into his schemes for the Festival. Yvonne should come to Fulminster, take her place at once in society under Mrs. Winstanley's chaperonage and win her welcome with her voice. Thus he would have an opportunity of judging her within his own environment. A complex mingling of passion and calculation.

And Yvonne, demurely innocent, had passed through the ordeal. As the Canon drove away from the "Elijah," he doubted no longer. Before she left Fulminster he would ask her to be his wife. It is characteristic of the man that he had no serious fears of her refusal.

The Festival was over. It was the day after. Miss Vicary and Vandeleur had returned to town by an early train and Yvonne was spending an idle morning over the fire. She had wandered round the shelves of the morning-room in search of a novel, and had selected "Corinne" because it was French. But Yvonne was a child of the age, and children of the age do not appreciate Madame de Staël. One can understand a dear old lady in curls and cap sighing lovingly over "Corinne," bringing back as it does memories of inky fingers and eternal friendships; but not — well, not Yvonne. She loved "Gyp." An unread volume was in her trunk upstairs. She felt too tired and lazy to get it. Besides, she was not quite sure whether the sight of "Gyp" would not shock Mrs. Winstanley, who was engaged over her voluminous correspondence at a table by the window.

"They have such queer prejudices," thought Yvonne. "One never knows."

So she dropped "Corinne" on to the floor and looked at the fire. In spite of her awe of Mrs. Winstanley, she was sorry to leave Fulminster. Life had been made very pleasant for her the last few days. Her throat was somewhat relaxed after the strain. She wished she could give it a long rest. But on Monday she was engaged to sing at a club concert at the Crystal Palace and in the morning she was to resume her singing lessons; and the weather in London was wet and muggy. It would be bliss to be idle, not to think of earning money and just to sing when you wanted. She turned her head and caught a chance glimpse of her hostess's face. The morning light streaming full upon it showed up pitilessly the network of lines beneath her eyes and the fallen contours of her lips and the roughness of her skin. Yvonne was startled at seeing her look so old and faded — a letter to a sister-in-law detailing Everard's folly did not conduce to sweetness of expression — and she wondered whether she, Yvonne, would be happy when she came to look like that. She shivered a little at the thought. Yes, the years would pass, leaving

their footprints, and she would grow old and her voice would pass away. It was dreadful. When Yvonne did enter the gloom, she made it very dark indeed, and summoned every available bogey. What should she do in her old age, when she could no longer earn her living? Geraldine was always preaching thrift, but she had put nothing by as yet. If she became incapacitated to-morrow, she did not know how she would live. She looked at the fire wistfully, her brow knitted in faint lines, and found her position very pathetic. But just then Bruce, Mrs. Winstanley's collie, rose from the rug and came and laid his chin on her knees, looking at her with great, mournful eyes. Yvonne broke into a sudden laugh, which astonished both Bruce and his mistress, and taking the dog's silky ears in her hands, she kissed his nose and rallied him gaily on his melancholy. So Yvonne stepped out of the darkness into the sunshine again.

Presently a servant entered.

"Canon Chisely would be glad if he could see Madame Latour for a moment."

"Where is the Canon?" asked Mrs. Winstanley.

"In the drawing-room, ma'am."

Yvonne rose quickly and went to her hostess, who slipped a sheet of blotting-paper over her half-finished page.

"Shall I go down?"

"Naturally."

Yvonne spoke a word to the servant, who retired, and then gave her hair a few tidying touches before the mirror in the over-mantel.

"I wonder if he has brought me those old Provençal songs."

"I hope he has, my dear," said Mrs. Winstanley, drily.

"Well, he is sure to have something nice to tell me, at any rate," replied Yvonne, in her sunny way.

The Canon was standing on the hearthrug, his hands behind his back. On the table lay his hat and gloves. Yvonne advanced quickly across the room to meet him, her face lit with genuine pleasure. He greeted her gravely and held her hand in both of his.

"I have come to have a serious talk with you."

"Have I been doing anything wrong?" asked Yvonne, looking up into his face.

"We shall see," he said, smiling. "Let us sit down."

Still holding her hand, he drew her to the couch by the fireside, and they sat down together.

"It is about yourself, Yvonne — I may call you Yvonne? — and about myself too. You have always felt that you have had a friend in me?"

"Ah! a dear friend, Canon. No one is to me the same as you. I shan't mind at all if you scold me."

She looked at him so guilelessly, so trustingly, that his heart melted over her. Verily she was the wife sent to him by heaven.

"I was but jesting, Yvonne. Besides, how could I dare scold you? It is I who come as a suppliant to you, my dear. I love you, and it is the dearest wish of my heart to make you my wife."

The sun died out of Yvonne's eyes, her heart stopped beating, she looked at him in piteous amazement.

"You — want me —?"

"Yes. Is it so strange?"

"You are jesting still — I don't understand —" She had withdrawn her hand from his clasp, and was sitting upright, twisting her handkerchief and trembling all over. It was so unexpected. She could scarcely trust her

senses. She had regarded him more as an influence than as a man. To Geraldine's wit she had given not a moment's thought. To marry Canon Chisely — the idea seemed unreal, preposterous. And yet she heard his voice pleading. She was overwhelmed by the sudden magnitude of responsibility. He had swooped down and caught her up through the vast moral spaces that lay between them, and she was dizzy and breathless.

"I do not press you for your answer," she heard him saying. "To-morrow — a week, a month hence — what you will. Take your time. I can give you a good name, comfort in worldly things — the ease and freedom from care which, thank God, my means allow — an honourable position, and a deep, true affection. Would you like me to wait a month before I speak to you again?"

"A month could make no difference," murmured Yvonne. "It would seem as strange then as now." There was a sudden pause in the whirl of her thoughts. Was it a bewildering device of his to show her kindness, provide for her future?

"I could n't accept it from you," she added incoherently.

"But it is I who want you, Yvonne," said the Canon, earnestly. "It is I who must have you to brighten my home and comfort my life. If your life is lying idle, as it were, Yvonne, give it me to use for my happiness. For months I have given this my deepest, most anxious thought. I am not a man to talk lightly of love and marriage. When I say that I want you, it means that you are necessary to me. And you trust me?"

"Above all men — of course —"

"Then your answer — 'yes,' or 'no,' or 'wait.'"

She was silent. He put his arm round her shoulders and drew her to him.

"You must be my wife, Yvonne. Why not say 'yes' now?"

She felt powerless beneath the strong will and authority of the man. Why he should wish to marry her, she could not understand; but his words had all the weight of an imperative.

"If you must have me, then —" said she in a quavering little voice, "I must do as you say."

"You will be happy, my child," he said, reassuringly. "I will make it all sunshine for you — you need have no fears."

He drew her yet closer to him and kissed her forehead; then he released her gently.

"So it's a promise?"

"Yes," said Yvonne.

"Then look into my eyes and say, 'Everard, I will take you for my husband.'"

He said it loverwise, and, dignitary though he was, with a touch of a lover's fatuity. The tone revived Yvonne's animation.

"Oh, I could n't," she cried, with a queer little laugh, midway between despair and gaiety. "I should n't dare — it would n't sound respectful."

"Try," said he. "Say 'Everard.'"

But Yvonne shook her head. "I must practise it by myself."

The Canon laughed. He was well contented with the world. Her modesty and innocence charmed him. Married though she had been, the fragrance of maidenhood seemed still to hover round her. She was an exquisite thing to have taken possession of.

"Are you happy?" he asked, taking her small brown hand that lay clasped with the other on her lap.

"I am too frightened to be happy — yet," she replied softly, with a shy lift of her eyes.

"I don't quite understand what has happened. Half an hour ago I was a poor little singer — and now —"

"You are my affianced wife," said the Canon, with grave promptness.

"That's what I can't realise. Everything seems topsy-turvy. Oh, it *is* your wish, Canon Chisely, is n't it? You are so good and wise, you would n't let me do anything that was not right?"

"Always trust to me for your happiness, Yvonne, and all will be well," answered the Canon.

Presently she rose, gave him her hand with simple dignity.

"I must go and think it over by myself. You will let me? Another time I will stay with you as long as you want me."

The Canon led her to the door, kissed her hand, bending low over it in an old-fashioned way, and bowed her out of the room. Then he rang for the servant and sent a message to Mrs. Winstanley. He was a man of prompt execution.

In the interview that followed, the Canon came off triumphant. He parried his cousin's thrusts of satire with a solicitude for her own

welfare that was not free from irony. If she had not so openly showed him her distaste for the marriage, he might have displayed some sympathy for her in the loss of *prestige* that she was sustaining as lady ruler of the Rectory. As matters stood, he considered she had forfeited it by her caprice. Besides, he had shrewdly determined that there should not be a triple dominion in his house.

"I hope she will extend your sphere of usefulness, Everard, as a wife should," said Mrs. Winstanley. "But she is inexperienced in these matters. You will not be hard upon her."

"I am only hard on those who disregard my authority. Then it is duty and not severity. Have you ever found me a harsh taskmaster, Emmeline?"

"You would n't compare us surely?"

"Certainly not. I could compare my wife with no other woman. It would be in all respects wrong."

"Well," she replied, bidding him adieu, "I hope that you will be happy."

"My dear Emmeline," said the Canon, "I have been humbly conscious for years that my happiness has always been one of your chief considerations."

From Mrs. Winstanley's he proceeded at once to Lady Santyre's, where he received congratulations and luncheon. He left with the comfortable certainty that all Fulminster would ring with the news of his engagement during the course of the afternoon. His announcement was as public as if he had proclaimed it from the pulpit. And Fulminster did ring as he had expected — not that it was unprepared, for the Canon's attentions to Madame Latour had been a subject of universal speculation. Murmurings arose in certain quarters. The neighbourhood abounded in the aristocratic fair unwedded, and the Canon was highly eligible. One of the aggrieved declared that all the Chiselys were eccentric, and instanced the unfortunate Stephen.

"My dear," replied in remonstrance her interlocutor, who had just married her last daughter to the leading manufacturer in Fulminster, "You must not talk as if the Canon had run off with a ballet-girl."

But generally his indiscretion was condoned. It had been a stroke of genius to let Yvonne charm her critics from a public platform at the very outset.

For Yvonne herself, the remainder of her

visit passed in a whirl. Families called upon her; mothers congratulated her; the "Fulminster Gazette" interviewed her; the Santyres changed the small dinner-party, to which she had been already asked, into a solemn banquet in her honour; and the Canon was ever at her side, attentive, courteous, dignified, authoritative, playing his part to perfection. The flattery pleased her. The universal deference paid to the Canon, of which she had grown more keenly conscious, awakened a shy pride. But it all seemed an incongruous dream, out of which she would awake when she found herself in her tiny flat in the Marylebone Road. She was afraid to go back. If it was a dream, she would regret this sudden lifting from her shoulders of all sordid cares, the dread of losing her voice, of poverty, and the grasshopper's wintry old age. If it continued true, she feared lest the familiar surroundings might pain her with regret for the life she was abandoning — the sweet artist's life, with all its inconsequences and its purposes, its hopes and fears, its freedom and its claims. Even now, she cried a little at the prospect of giving it up. And then she would n't know herself. Hitherto, her conception of herself had been —

Yvonne Latour, the singer. That was her Alpha and Omega. It would be like looking in the glass and seeing a total stranger. It was pathetic.

On Sunday she received a series of sensations. She believed such elemental doctrines as she had received at her mother's knee: in a beautiful heaven and a fearful hell, in Christ and the angels — she was not quite certain about the Virgin Mary — in the Lord's Prayer, which she said every night at her bedside, and in the goodness of going to church. Her religion might have been that of a bird of the air for all the shackles it laid upon her soul. But the outer forms of worship impressed her strongly — church music, solemn silences, vestments, stained windows, even words. She felt very solemn when she called her innocent self a "miserable sinner" in the Litany, and the word "Sabbaoth," in the "Te Deum," always seemed fraught with mystic meaning. The symbolic hushed her into awe. Even the surplices of the choir-boys set them apart for the moment, in her mind, from the baser sort of urchins. And, *a fortiori*, the clergyman, in surplice and stole, had always appealed to her childish imagination as

a being that moved in an especial odour of sanctity. It is fair to add that Yvonne's church-going had never been as regular as might have been desired, so these reverential feelings had not been staled by custom. However, when the Canon appeared at the reading-desk, and his fine voice rang through the Abbey, Yvonne felt a sudden pang of alarm. The night before he had been so tender and playful that he had almost seemed to be upon her level. And now, he was far, far away. The distance between her, poor, insignificant little Yvonne, and him performing his sacred office, appeared immeasurably vast. And when he mounted the pulpit, her awe grew greater. She could not realise that he was her affianced husband.

He preached on the text from the story of Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again." The words caught her fancy as being apposite to her own case, and, disregarding the thread of the Canon's discourse, she preached a little sermon to herself. She was going to be born again. Yvonne the singer would die, and a new, regenerate Yvonne, the lady of the Rectory, Mrs. Everard Chisely, would appear in her stead. She caught a phrase in which the

Canon touched upon the spiritual pain attending on the death of the old Adam. She wondered whether she would be called upon to suffer the fire of purification. It was like the Phœnix. At this point she pulled herself up short. To mix up the Phœnix and Nicodemus might be profane. So she bestowed her best attention on the remainder of the sermon.

That afternoon he took her through the Rectory — a great rambling Elizabethan house, with nineteenth-century additions. She followed him meekly from room to room, filled with wonder at the beauty of her future home. The Canon had spent much money over his collections — overmuch, some critics said — and the house was a museum of art treasures. Pictures, statuary, wood-carvings, rare furniture met her in every apartment, at every turn of the stairs. At first, the awe with which his sacerdotal character had inspired her kept her subdued, but gradually the new impressions effaced it. He spoke as if all these things were already hers — established, as it were, a joint ownership.

"This is your own boudoir," he said, as he led her into a pleasant room, overlooking the lawn and commanding a view of the

Abbey. "Do you think you will be happy in it?"

"I must be," she said, gratefully. "Not only because you have given me the most beautiful room in the whole house, but because you are so good to me in all things."

"Who could help being good to you, my child?" said the Canon.

He was sincere. Yvonne felt humbled and yet lifted. Her eyes dwelt for a shy moment on his. He seemed so kind, so loyal, so indulgent, and yet a man so greatly to be venerated and honoured, that all her sweet womanhood was moved. Standing, too, in this room that was to be her own, she felt the future melt into the present. Her hand slipped timidly through his arm.

"I shall never know why you want me," she said, in a low voice, "but I pray God I may be a good and loving and obedient wife to you."

"Amen, dear," said the Canon, kissing her.

CHAPTER X

COUNSELS OF PERFECTION

So Yvonne was married, and for six months was completely happy. Fulminster and the county entertained her, and she entertained Fulminster and the county. Her husband petted her and relieved her of serious responsibilities. She won the hearts of Mrs. Dirks the housekeeper, of Jordan the gardener, and Fletcher the coachman, three autocrats in their respective spheres of influence — victories whereby she controlled the menu, filled the house with whatever flowers struck her fancy, and had out the horses at the moment of her caprice. Her quick wit soon obtained a grasp upon domestic affairs and her headship in the household was a practical fact which the Canon proudly recognised. Her social duties she performed with the tact born of simplicity. Mrs. Winstanley went away raging after her first dinner-party. She had expected a consoling

proof of incapacity and had witnessed a little triumph of hostess-ship.

Not a cloud had appeared on her horizon since the wedding-day, when they had started upon a magic month in Italy, among blue lakes and bluer skies and gorgeous pictures and marble palaces. After that, there had been the excitement of home-coming, the fluttering sweetness of taking possession, the bewildering succession of fresh faces in her drawing-room, the long drives to return calls, and to attend parties in her honour. The new duties interested her. She revelled in an infants' class at the Sunday school, which she instructed in a theology undreamed of by the Fathers. She sang at local concerts. She dressed herself in dainty raiment to please her husband's eye. In fact she made a study of his æsthetic tastes from food to music, and delighted in gratifying them. With feminine pliancy she strove to adapt her moods to his. His face became a book which she loved to read when they met after a few hours' absence; and, according to what she read, she became demure, or gay, or businesslike. In her leisure hours she sang to herself, read French novels, which she obtained in unlimited supply from London, and sought

the society of Sophia Wilmington and her brother, who quickly constituted themselves her chief friends and advisers in Fulminster. Often she sat idle and gave herself up to dreamy contemplation of her beatitude.

In these moods comparisons would arise between her two marriages, and between the two men. Scenes, almost forgotten during the years of her widowhood, revived in her memory. Phases of present wedded relations brought back vividly analogous phases in the past. The contrast sometimes produced an emotion that seemed too great for self-containment, and she longed to open her heart to her husband. But she dared not. Love might have broken down barriers, but not the grateful, respectful affection she bore the Canon. Besides, beyond one little talk, two years ago, at the house of Stephen's mother during her last illness, no mention had been made between them of Amédée Bazouge. Man-like, he preferred to dismiss the circumstance from his mind as unpleasant. But the woman found pleasure in remembering, and in using the contrasts to heighten her present happiness.

Thus for six months she had known no trouble, and had laughed at her old tremulous

misgivings as to her capacity for filling her present position.

Suddenly, one afternoon in early June, as they were sitting in the shadow of the old Abbey, cast across half the lawn, the Canon laid down the review he was reading by the foot of his chair, and, deliberately folding his gold pince-nez and thrusting it in his waistcoat, looked at her and said, "Yvonne."

She closed "Le Petit Bob" with a snap, and became dutiful and smiling attention.

"I have something to say to you," he remarked gravely; "something perhaps painful — about certain possible little changes in our lives."

"Changes?" echoed Yvonne blankly.

"Yes, I have been wishing to speak for some months past. I think, dear, you ought to be more serious, and give me greater help than you have done hitherto. Do you follow me?"

If the quiet Rectory garden had suddenly been transformed into a Sahara, and the golden laburnum by which she was sitting, into a pillar of fire, she could not have been more bewildered. But she felt a horrible pain, as from a stab, and the tears started to her eyes.

"No. Not at all — what is it?"

"I don't wish to be unkind to you, Yvonne. I am only speaking from a sense of duty. Once said, it will be, I am sure, enough."

"But what is it? What is it?" she repeated piteously. "What have I done to displease you?"

He took up his parable, with crossed legs and joined finger tips, and in a quiet, unemotional voice catalogued her failings. She was not sufficiently alive to the deeper responsibilities of her position. Many parochial duties that devolved upon the Rector's wife, she had left undone. She took no pains to improve her acquaintance with doctrinal and ecclesiastical affairs.

"I am not exaggerating," he said, "for you did tell the Sunday-school children that St. John the Baptist was present at the Crucifixion, Yvonne, did n't you?"

He smiled, as if to soften the severity of his charges; but Yvonne's face was fixed in tragic dismay, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

He rose and advanced to her with outstretched arms. She obeyed his suggestion mechanically and allowed herself to stand in his embrace.

"It is best to say it all out at once, Yvonne," he said gently. "And you will think over it, I know. You must n't be hurt, little wife."

But she was — to the depths of her heart. "I did n't know you were not pleased with me," she said with trembling lip. "I thought I was doing my very best to make you happy."

"And you have, my child — very happy."

"Oh no — I have n't. I will try to do what you want, Everard. But I told you I was n't fit for you — I can do nothing, nothing but just sing a little. But I will try Everard. Forgive me."

"Freely, freely, dearest," said the magnanimous man, patting her on the shoulder. "There, there," he added, kissing her forehead. "It pained me intensely to say what I did. But if duties were always pleasant, it would be a world of righteousness. Dry your eyes and smile, Yvonne. And come and play my accompaniment for a few minutes before dinner."

He drew her arm within his and led her into the house, through the open French window, talking of trifles to assure her of his affectionate forgiveness. It was not in Yvonne's nature to

show resentment. She fell outwardly into his humour, and thanked him sweetly for his somewhat exaggerated attentions in arranging the piano and music; but as she played, the notes became blurred.

"A little out there," he said, standing behind her, his violin under his chin. "Let us go back four bars."

She struggled on bravely, biting her lip to keep back the tears that would come and render the page illegible. At last a drop fell on a black note, as she was bending her head towards the music-book. The Canon stopped short and laid his violin and bow hastily on the piano.

"My dearest," he exclaimed, stooping over her. "It is all over. Don't be unhappy. I did not mean to be unkind to you. I am afraid I was. It is I who am not fit for so tender and sensitive a nature."

He sat down by her on the broad piano-seat and let her cry upon his shoulder. He had an uncomfortable feeling that in some way he had been brutal. A man must be as hard as Mephistopheles not to experience this sensation the first time he makes a woman cry. The second or third time he calls his attitude firmness; afterwards he characterises her con-

duct as unreasonable. A wise woman makes the very most of the first tears of her married life. But Yvonne was not a wise woman. She dried her eyes as fast as she could, and felt ashamed and humbled, and went and bathed them in eau-de-cologne and water, and, seeing that the Canon desired her to be her old self, for that evening at any rate, did her best to humour him.

After this, her life went on, not unhappily, but unlifted by the buoyancy of the first six months. Her illusions had been shattered. The spontaneity of her actions was checked. They became little tasks, whose excellence she could not judge until the Canon had pronounced upon them. She made prodigious efforts to fulfil his wishes. Some met with success. Others, such as attempts at parish organisation, failed. Mrs. Winstanley, like Betsy Jane in Artemus Ward's book, would not be reorganised. The Canon intervened, but his cousin stood firm, and at last he had to yield. In district visiting, Yvonne had hard struggles. If she had carried her own charming *insouciance* into working homes, she would have won all hearts. But, morbidly conscious of the responsibilities of her position, she judged it

her duty to cast frivolity from her and to put on the serious dignity of the Rector's wife, which fitted her as easily as a suit of armour. As for theology, she read with a zeal only equalled by her incapacity of appreciating the drift of the science. To the end of her days Yvonne could see no other difference between a Churchman and a Dissenter, except that one had a pretty service and the other a dull one. So closely, however, did she pursue her studies that the Canon took pity on her, and came back from London one day with "Gyp's" latest production in his pocket. It would have done an archbishop good to see the gleam of pleasure in Yvonne's eyes.

Six more months passed, and Yvonne began to weary of the strain of self-improvement. The sterner side of the Canon's character showed itself in a hundred little ways. Small censurings became frequent, praise difficult to obtain. With the Canon's gracious consent, she despatched at last an invitation to Geraldine, who had already paid her a visit in the spring. But that was in the days of her happiness.

Geraldine came, and her keen wit very soon penetrated the situation. Yvonne had been too loyal to complain.

"You 've just got to tell me all about it," she said in her determined fashion.

It was their first evening, after dinner, as soon as the Canon had gone down to his library.

"All about what, Dina?" asked Yvonne.

"Oh, don't pretend not to know. You were as happy as a bird when I was here last, and now you don't open your mouth."

"I think I want a change," said Yvonne. "I am getting too respectable. At first, you see, everything was new, and now I have got used to it. I think if I could run about London by myself for a month, and sing at lots of concerts, it would do me good. And oh, Dina — I should so much like to hear a man say 'damn' again!"

"Well, I'm not a man, but I'll say it for you — damn, damn, damn. Now do you feel better?"

"Oh, you look so funny as you say it!" cried Yvonne, with a laugh. "I wish it was something artistic and you could teach it to the Canon."

"It strikes me, if I were to set about it, I could teach the Canon a good many things. First of all, what a treasure he has got — which he does n't seem quite aware of."

"Oh, Dina, you must n't say that," said Yvonne, looking shocked. "He is all kindness and indulgence — really, dear. If I feel dull, it is because I am wicked and hanker after frivolous things — Van, for instance, and a comic song. Do you know you have n't once spoken about Van?"

"Oh, don't talk of Van," said Miss Vicary; "I am getting tired of him. He never knows his mind three days together. If I was n't a fool I would give him up for good and all."

"But why don't you marry and make an end of it?" asked Yvonne. "I don't understand."

"Ask Van. Don't ask me. There's somebody else now. Elsie Carnegie, of all people."

"Poor Dina."

"Oh, not at all. Dina is not going to break her heart over Van's infidelities. I'm quite content as I am. Only I'm a fool — there! I've never told you I was a fool before, Yvonne. That's because you are so sedate and respectable. I'm getting to venerate you."

"I should like to talk to him seriously about it — for his good."

"Oh, heavens, my child, he'd be falling in

love with you again and having the whole artillery of the Church about his ears!"

Yvonne laughed gaily. The talk was doing her good. Geraldine's forcible phraseology was a tonic after the politer accents of Fulminster. They drifted away unconsciously from the main subject upon which they had started. Geraldine had many things to tell of the doings in the musical world.

"Oh, I wish I was back for a little," cried poor Yvonne. "Singing in a amateur way is not like singing professionally, is it?"

"I think you are better where you are," replied Geraldine, seriously, "in spite of all things. It is no use being discontented."

"Not a bit," sighed Yvonne. She was silent for a little, and then she turned round to Geraldine.

"I don't think you would do very well married, Dina. You are too independent. A woman has to give in so much, you know; and do so much pretending, which you could never do."

"And why pretend?"

"Oh, I don't know. You have to — in lots of things. I suppose we women were born for it. Men have all kinds of strange feelings, and

they expect us to have the same, and we have n't, Dina; and yet they would be hurt and miserable if we told them so — so we have to pretend."

Geraldine looked at her with an expression of pain on her strong face, and then she bent down — Yvonne was on a low stool by her side — and flung her arms about her.

"Oh, my dear little philosopher, I wish to God you could have loved a man — and married him! That is happiness — no need of pretending. I knew it once — years ago. It only lasted a few months, for he died before we announced our marriage — no one has ever known. Only you, now, dear. Try and love your husband, dear — give him your soul and passion. It is the only thing I can tell you to help you, dear. Then all the troubles will go. Oh, darling, to love a man vehemently — they say it is a woman's greatest curse. It is n't; it is the greatest blessing of God on her."

"You are speaking as men have spoken," replied Yvonne, in a whisper, holding her friend's hand tightly. "I never knew before — but God will never bless me — like that."

CHAPTER XI

THE OUTCAST COUSIN

The autumn hardened into winter and the winter softened into spring, and the relations between Yvonne and the Canon seemed to follow the seasons' difference. He had learned her limitations and no longer set her tasks beyond her powers.

"You must not try to put a butterfly into harness," said Mrs. Winstanley, who had gradually been gaining lost influence. He had called to consult her upon some parochial question and the talk had turned upon Yvonne. The Canon bit his lip. He had fallen into the habit of making confidences and regretting them a moment afterwards.

"You do Yvonne injustice."

"I did once, I grant," she replied; "but now, as you see, I am pleading for her."

"Yvonne needs no advocate with me," said the Canon, stiffly.

"She may."

"What do you mean, Emmeline?"

"If you don't understand her nature, you may misinterpret her conduct. You see, Everard, she is young and light-natured — and so, like seeks like. You may always count upon me to keep things straight outside."

She had laid her hand upon his arm, and spoke in her quiet, authoritative voice. Her manner was too dignified to be intrusive. She was eminently the woman of sense. Her reference was well understood by him, but being a man accustomed to the broad issues of life, he did not appreciate the delicate pleasure such a conversation afforded her.

On this occasion, he went from her house straight to the Rectory, and in the drawing-room found young Evan Wilmington bidding good-bye to Yvonne. Her sunniest smile rested on the young fellow; when the door shut upon him, the after-glow of amusement was still upon her face. The Canon felt an absurd pang of jealousy. Such had not been infrequent of late, since he had abandoned his scheme of reorganisation. In fact, as Yvonne had fallen from his conjugal ideal — the woman who, as an impeccable consort and mother of chil-

dren was to lend added dignity to his days — his feelings as regards her had been growing more helplessly human. His conception of the dove-like innocence of her nature had suffered no change. Her pure voice had ever been to him the speech of a purer soul. It was no vulgar jealousy that pained him; but jealousy it was, all the same.

He went to her and put his hands against her cheeks and held up her face.

"Don't smile too much on young Evan," he said. "It is not good for him. I want all your best smiles for myself, sweetheart."

"He has been making me laugh," said Yvonne.

"And I cannot?"

"He is a silly boy and you are the venerable Canon Chisely."

"That 's it," he said, rather bitterly, releasing her.

Her expression changed. She caught him, as he was turning away, by the lappels of his coat.

"Are you serious, Everard? You are! Forgive me if I have hurt you. I can't bear to do it. Do you wish me to see less of Mr. Wilmington — really?"

Looking into her eyes he felt ashamed of his pettiness.

"See your friends as much as you like, my child," he said, with a revulsion of feeling.

The matter was settled for the time being, but thenceforward the even tenor of their life was disturbed occasionally by such outbursts. Once he grew angry. "You have the same smile for any man who speaks to you, Yvonne."

She replied with gentle logic, "That ought to prove that I like all equally."

"Your husband included."

She turned away wounded. "You have no right to say that."

"Then what have I a right to say, Yvonne?"

"Anything," she cried, facing him with brightening eyes, "anything except that I do not try with all my heart and soul to be a good wife to you."

This time it was he who said "Forgive me."

Unconsciously her influence grew upon him in his lighter moods, as he excluded her from participation in his serious concerns. To win from her a flash other than dutiful he would humour any caprice. Yvonne was too shrewd not to perceive this. His tenderness touched her, saddened her a little. On her birthday he

gave her a pair of tiny ponies and a diminutive phaeton — a perfect turn-out. He lived for a week on the delight in her face when they were brought round (an absolute surprise) to the front door. Yet that evening she said, with her little air of seriousness, after she had been meditating for some time in silence, with puckered brow: —

"I wonder if I am quite such a child as you think me, Everard. I should like something to happen to show you that I am a woman."

"Don't say that, dear," he replied, contentedly, holding up his glass of port to the light and peering into it — he was a specialist in ports — "such a chance would probably be some calamity."

Yvonne was not alone in noting the true inwardness of the Canon's course of action. Mrs. Winstanley did so, to her own chagrin. The ponies were as distasteful to her as the beast of the Apocalypse. She was with Lady Santyre, in the latter's barouche, when she first saw them. Yvonne, aglow with the effort of driving, was sending them down the Fulminster Road at a rattling pace. She nodded brightly as she passed, pointing to the ponies with her whip.

"How fond the dear Canon is of that little woman," said Lady Santyre, her thin lips closing as if on an acidulated drop.

"Psha!" said Mrs. Winstanley, with one of her rare exhibitions of temper. "If he were a few years older, it would be senile infatuation! She is beginning to curl him round her finger."

But there was one subject near to Yvonne's heart on which the Canon was inflexible — Joyce. Often Yvonne had sought to soften him toward the black sheep, but in his gentlest moods the mention of his cousin's name turned him to adamant. He even resented Yvonne's helpful friendship before her marriage. On the afternoon that he had passed Joyce on the stairs, he had spoken as strongly to Yvonne as good taste permitted. Now that he had authority over her, he forbade her to hold further communication with the man who had disgraced his name. Finally she abandoned her attempts at conciliation, but pity prevailing over wifely obedience, she kept up her correspondence with Joyce, unknown to the Canon. That is to say, she wrote cheery, gossipy letters now and then to the address she had received from Cape Town, trusting to luck for their ultimate delivery, but receiving very

few in return, for Joyce had often not the heart to write.

She was reading, one day, his last letter, many pages closely filled. It had come that morning, under Miss Vicary's cover, according to her request. The envelope lay on the table in the centre of the room; but she had taken the letter to the broad, cushioned window-seat, her favourite place in summer, where she could see the old abbey, and enjoy the scent of the mignonette and syringa from the beds below. It was the quiet afternoon hour, before tea, when she generally read or idled or sang to herself. She was at peace with all the world, and her heart was full of pity for Joyce.

Yet it was the most hopeful of the four letters she had received from him. The previous ones had told of struggles and privations innumerable; the aimless tramp from one town to another in the search for more than starvation wages; the hopeless attempts to live in mining camps, where unskilled labour was a drug in the market; sickness, and the dwindling of his little capital. This one took up the tale broken off some months before. Noakes and himself had left the mines, had wandered, sometimes alone, sometimes with

other adventurers, into Bechuanaland, where he had purchased with his last remaining pounds a share in a small farm. It was a haven of rest. But the country was unhealthy. The work was hard. Noakes lay ill in bed; medical advice was a hundred and fifty miles away. To cheer the invalid, he had schemed out a novel on the life they had recently passed through, and was writing it at nights for Noakes to read during the day. He was writing it on a bundle of yellow package-paper which had remained over from the stock of a small "store" once run by the chief owner of the farm.

He spoke of the comfort of her letters. Four of them had just come to his hands at once. He had read them aloud to Noakes, who was even more friendless than himself. Yvonne's heart was touched at the thought of the poor man who never got a letter, and had to extract vicarious comfort from his friend's. She knew him quite well through Joyce's description, and loved him for the quaint lovableness that appeared in the narrative of their joint fortunes.

"He shall have a letter all to himself," said Yvonne aloud; and she rose to put her idea into execution.

But just as she was bringing her writing materials to the window-seat, which was strewn with the sheets of Joyce's letter, the Canon came into the room.

"Can you give me some tea quickly, dear?" he said, ringing the bell. "I am called away to Bickerton."

He sank into a chair with a sigh of relief. It had been a busy day and the weather was hot.

"Would you like me to drive you over?" asked Yvonne.

"Dearly," said the Canon. He leaned back, and stretched out his hand in a gesture of contented invitation.

"It won't be taking you from your correspondence? You seem up to your eyes in it."

"Oh, it can wait," said Yvonne, smiling down upon him as he held her hand.

Soon the servant brought the tea, and Yvonne established herself over the tea-cups. The Canon, whilst waiting, glanced idly at the books and odds and ends on the table by his side. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise. He had become aware of the foreign envelope, with the Cape Colony stamp and its

address to "Mrs. Chisely, care of Miss Vicary." He also recognised Joyce's handwriting which happened to be singularly striking in character. His brow grew dark.

"What is the meaning of this, Yvonne?"

"A letter from Stephen," she replied with a sudden qualm.

"And sent to you clandestinely. You have been corresponding with him secretly in defiance of my express desire. How dared you do it?"

He spoke in harsh tones, bending upon her all the hardness of a stern face. She had never seen him angered like this before. She was frightened, but she steadied herself and looked him in the face.

"I could n't help it, Everard," she said, gently. "The poor fellow regards me as his only friend. I was forced to disobey you."

"That poor fellow has been guilty of mean robbery. He has herded with ruffians in a common gaol. He has dragged an old honoured name through the mire. For a man like that — once a knave always a knave. I don't choose to have my wife keeping up friendly relations with an outcast member of my family. I am deeply offended with you — I pass over

the underhand nature of the correspondence, which in itself deserves reprobation."

"I believe in Stephen," replied Yvonne, growing very white. "He has been punished a thousand times over. He will live an honourable man to the end of his life. And if you read how he speaks of the few silly letters I have written him — his joy and gratitude — you would not wish to deprive him of them."

"Do you mean to say that you are deliberately setting yourself in opposition to my wishes, Yvonne?" asked the Canon in angry surprise.

Yvonne was in great distress. She could not defy him openly, and yet she knew that no power on earth would prevent her from doing Joyce her little deeds of mercy.

She looked at him piteously for a moment, and then sank by his chair and clasped his knees. "I can't do what you want, Everard," she cried. "We were such friends in days past — And when I met him again, he looked so broken and lonely — I could n't in my heart let him go — and having given him my friendship, I can't be so cruel as to take it from him now. I can't feel what you do about the disgrace. I have n't the capacity perhaps.

And I promised his dead mother to be kind to him. I did indeed, Everard — and a promise like that I must keep."

He put her not unkindly from him and, rising to his feet, took two or three turns about the room. Stopping, he said: —

"Why did you not tell me of this promise before?"

"I was afraid to vex you," said Yvonne.

"You have vexed me much more by deceiving me," he replied.

But there the matter had to end. He could not bid her break her word, nor would he allow himself to yield to a tempting sophistry that women's ante-nuptial promises were annulled by marriage. To regain his good graces, however, Yvonne pledged herself never to intercede with him on Joyce's behalf in the future — in fact to preserve an absolute silence concerning the black sheep and his doings.

This settled, she drove him over to Bickerton in her pony carriage. And the even tenor of her life went on.

It was many weeks before the letters arrived at the farm in South Africa. The monthly ox-waggons that came from the nearest post-

town brought them, together with the usual load of farm and household requisites, tinned provisions, and liquors. Day after day, Joyce had stood by the prickly-pear hedge on the rise behind the house, looking over the dreary plain, in wistful watch for the specks on the horizon that alone connected him with civilisation. They arrived at night — a blustering August night, with frost in the air, and a cloudless sky in which the Southern Cross gleamed. Before waiting to help unload and outspan the teams, he rushed into the house with the meagre post-bundle. It contained a few colonial newspapers, some letters for Wilson, the farmer who was away, and the two letters from Fulminster. The rough table, on which he sorted them by the light of a flaring chimneyless lamp, was drawn up to the bedside of Noakes.

"One for you, old man," said Joyce.

"For me?"

Noakes stretched out his thin arm eagerly, and clutched the undreamed of prize.

"From Yvonne. It's to cheer you up, old chap, I expect. It's just like her, you know."

Joyce ran through his letter rapidly and went out to superintend the unloading. But

Noakes, who was past work, remained in bed and pored over Yvonne's simple lines till the tears came into his eyes.

When all was settled, the stores taken in, the teams secured, the natives who had driven them established in the huts, and finally the Englishman in charge provided with food and whisky and sent to sleep, Joyce sat down by his friend's side and gave himself up to the greatest pleasure his life then held. The wind howled outside, and the draught swept in through the cracks on the doors, and the ill-fitting windows, and up the rude chimney beneath which a fire was smouldering. Noakes coughed incessantly. The atmosphere was tainted with the smell of the lamp, the thin smoke from the fuel, the piles of sacking and mealy-bags that lay in corners of the room, and the strips of bultong or dried beef hanging in the gloom of the rafters. The room itself, occupying nearly the whole area of the ground-floor of the rudely built wooden house, was cheerless in aspect. The table, two or three wooden chairs, some shelves holding cooking utensils and odds and ends of crockery, a litter of stores and boxes, a frameless dirty oleograph of the bubble-blowing boy, a

churchman's almanac, two years old, against the wall, and Noakes's sack bed — that was all the room contained. In a corner was a ladder leading to the loft, where Joyce and the farmer slept, and whence now came the muffled sounds of the snoring of the English driver. But for a few moments Joyce forgot the cheerless surroundings.

He sat late with Noakes, reading the letters aloud and talking of Yvonne. At last, after a short silence, Noakes raised himself on his elbow and gazed earnestly at his friend. He was very gaunt and wasted —

"That 's the only tender thing a woman has ever done for me," he said. "No," he added in reply to Joyce's questioning look, "my wife was never tender. God knows why she married me."

"We 'll make our fortunes and go back, and you shall know her," said Joyce.

"No. I shall never go back. I shall never get half a mile beyond this door again."

"Nonsense," said Joyce. "You 'll pull round when the spring comes."

"I have performed my allotted task. It was a severe portion and it has finished me off."

"Look here, old man," cried Joyce, "for

God's sake don't talk like that. I can't live in this accursed place by myself. You 've been broken down by our hard times — but you 'll get over it all, with this long rest."

"I am going to a longer one, Joyce. I don't mind going, you know. And then you 'll be free of me. I am but a cumberer of the ground — I am of no use — I never have been of any use — I have been carrying water in a sieve all my life."

He began to cough. Joyce put his arm around him for support, and tended him gently.

"You have a lot to do, old man," he said soon after. "The foolscap has come, and a great jar of ink, and you can start copying out the manuscript to-morrow."

"Ah yes, I can do that," said Noakes.

"Now go to sleep. I 'll sit by you, if you like," said Joyce.

He moved the lamp to a ledge behind Noakes's head, and sat down near by, with the budget of newspapers. Noakes composed himself to sleep. At last he spoke, without turning round.

"Joyce."

"Yes, old man."

"Make me a promise."

"Willingly."

"Bury that dear lady's letter with me."

"Will it make you happy to promise?"

"Yes."

"Then I promise," said Joyce, humouring him. "Now I'm not going to talk to you any more."

A few minutes later, his breathing told Joyce that he slept. The newspapers fell from Joyce's hand, and he put his elbows on his knees and crouched over the smouldering logs. Noakes spoke truly. There was little chance of recovery. He would be left alone again soon. It would be very comfortless. The poor wreck who was dragging out his last days upon that wretched bed had been an unspeakable solace to him. Without his womanlike devotion he would have died of fever six months back on the Arato goldfield. Without the influence of his calm fatalism, he would have given up heart long ago. Without his steadfast purity of soul, he would have gone recklessly to the devil. The thought of losing him was a great pang.

He himself, too, was far from strong. The climate, the hard manual labour for which he

was physically unfit were telling upon him heavily. He yearned for home, for civilised life, for the lost heritage of honour. Yvonne's letter, telling of the little commonplaces of the lost sweet life of decent living, had revived the ever dormant longing. He began to dream of her, of that last day he had seen her, of her voice singing Gounod's serenade.

It was difficult to picture her as married to his cousin Everard, whom, in the days of his vanity, he had despised as a prig and now dreaded as a scornful benefactor. It was a strange mating. And yet she seemed happy and unchanged.

The wind blustered outside. The cold draught whistled through the room. Joyce rose to his feet with a shiver, went to a corner for a couple of sacks, which he threw over the sleeping man, and, after having wistfully read Yvonne's letter once more, ascended the ladder to the loft, where the shapeless mattress of dried grass and sacking awaited him.

CHAPTER XII

HISTOIRE DE REVENANT

OSTEND is a magnificent white Kursaal on the Belgian coast. Certain requisites are attached to it in the way of great hotels and villas along a tiled *digue*, and innumerable bathing-machines on the sands below. There is an old town, it is true, somewhere behind it, with quaint narrow streets, a Place d'Armes dotted round with cafés, and a thronged market-square; there is also a bustling port and a fishing population. But the Ostend of practical life begins and ends at the Kursaal. Were it to perish during a night, the following day would see the exodus of twenty thousand visitors. The vast glass rotunda can hold thousands. Within its precincts you can do anything in reason and out of reason. You can knit all day long like Penelope, or you can go among the Sirens with or without the precautions of Ulysses. You can consume anything from a biscuit to a ten-

course dinner. You can play dominoes at centime points or roulette with a forty-franc minimum. You can listen to music, you can dance, you can go to sleep. You can write letters, send telegrams, and open a savings-bank account. By moving to one side or the other of a glass screen you can sit in the warm sunshine or in the keen sea wind. You can study the fashions of Europe from St. Petersburg to Dublin, and if you are a woman, you can wear the most sumptuous garments Providence has deigned to bestow on you. And lastly, if you are looking for a place where you will be sure to find the very last person in the world you desire to see, you will meet with every success at the Kursaal of Ostend.

Such was Mrs. Winstanley's passing thought one day. She was there with Sophia and Evan Wilmington. It was always a great pleasure, she used to say, to have young people about her; and very naturally, since young people can be particularly useful in strange places to a middle-aged lady. The brother and sister fetched and carried for her all day long, which was very nice and suitable, and Mrs. Winstanley was in her most affable mood. On the day in question, however, she saw, to her as-

tonishment and annoyance, Canon Chisely and Yvonne making their way towards her through the crowded lines of tables.

"Good gracious, Everard!" she said as they came up. "How did you find your way here? I thought you were going to Switzerland."

"So we are," replied the Canon. "We have broken our journey. And as for getting here, we took the boat from Dover and then walked."

"The frivolity of the place is infecting you already, Canon," cried Sophia, with a laugh. "I hope you are going to stay a long time."

"Oh, not too long," said Yvonne. "It would n't be fair to the Canon, who needs some mountain air. This is just a little treat all for me."

She glanced at him affectionately as she spoke. It was good of him to tarry for her sake in this Vanity Fair of a place.

"We were going by Calais, as you know," said the Canon, explanatively to Mrs. Winstanley. "We only changed our minds a day or two ago — we thought it would be a little surprise for you."

"Of course it is — a delightful one — to see

dear Yvonne and yourself. Where are you staying?"

"At the Océan," said the Canon, "and you must all come and dine with us this evening."

"And will you come to the *bal* here afterward?" asked Sophia. "Evan has run across some college friends — or won't you think it proper?"

"I am going to wear the whole suit of motley while I am here," replied the Canon gaily.

He kept his word, not being a man of half measures. No check should be placed on Yvonne's enjoyment. She had been moping, as far as Yvonne could mope, during the latter dullness of Fulminster; now she expanded like a flower to the gaiety around her. The Canon found an æsthetic pleasure in watching her happiness. Her expressions of thanks too were charmingly conveyed. Since that unfortunate attempt on his part, over a twelvemonth back, to instruct her in the responsibilities of her position, she had never exhibited toward him such spontaneous feeling. He let her smile upon whom she would, without a twinge of jealousy.

Yvonne enjoyed herself hugely. She danced and jested with the young men; she chattered

in French to her table d'hôte neighbours, delighted to speak her mother's tongue again; she staked two-franc pieces on the public table, and one afternoon came out of the gaming-room into the great hall where the Canon was sitting with Mrs. Winstanley, and poured a great mass of silver on to the table — as much as her two small hands joined could carry.

"I thought gambling was against your principles, Everard," said Mrs. Winstanley, after Yvonne had gone again.

"I am sacrificing them for my wife's happiness, Emmeline," he replied, with a touch of irony.

"Yes, it would be a pity to spoil her pleasure. She is such a child."

"I wish we all had something of her nature," said the Canon.

Mrs. Winstanley noted the snub. She was treasuring up many resentments against Yvonne. In her heart she considered herself a long-suffering woman.

"You seem to enjoy it too, Everard," said Yvonne to him that evening. They were sitting near the entrance watching the smartly-dressed people. "And I am so glad to be alone with you."

He was pleased, smiled at her, and throwing off his dignity, entered into the frivolous spirit of the place. Yvonne forgot the restraint she had always put upon her tongue when talking to him. She chattered about everything, holding her face near him, so as to be heard through the hubbub of thousands of voices, the eternal shuffling of passing feet, and the crash of the orchestra in the far gallery.

"It is a *Revue des Deux Mondes*," she said, looking rapidly around her, with bright eyes.

"How?" asked the Canon.

"The *beau* and the *demi*," she replied, wickedly. She shook his knee. "Oh, do look at that woman! what does she think a man can see in her!"

"Powder," answered the Canon. "She has been using her puff too freely."

"She has been putting it on with a *muff*," cried Yvonne.

He laughed. Yvonne had such a triumphant air in delivering herself of little witticisms.

A magnificently dressed woman, in a great feathered hat and low-dress, with diamonds gleaming at her neck, passed by. "You are right, I fear, about the two worlds," said the Canon.

"Are n't there crowds of them? I like to look at them because they wear such beautiful things. And they fit so. And then to rub shoulders with them makes one feel so delightfully wicked. You know, I knew a girl once — she went in for that life of her own accord and she was awfully happy. Really. Is n't it odd?"

"My dear Yvonne!" said the Canon, somewhat shocked, "I sincerely trust you did not continue the acquaintance, afterwards."

"Oh, no," she replied, sagely. "It would not have done for me at all. A lone woman can't be too careful. But I used to hear about her from my dressmaker."

Her point of view was not exactly the Canon's. But further discussion was stopped by the arrival of the Wilmingtons, who carried off Yvonne to the dancing-room. The Canon, drawing the line at his own appearance there, strolled back contentedly to the hotel to finish the evening over a book.

Two mornings afterwards Yvonne was walking by herself along the *digue*. They were to leave for Switzerland the next day, and she determined to make the most of her remaining time. Sophia Wilmington, for whom she had

called, had already gone out. The Canon, who was engaged over his correspondence, she was to meet later at the Kursaal. It was a lovely morning. The line of white hotels, with their al fresco breakfast tables spread temptingly on the terraces, gleamed in the sun. The *digue* was bright with summer dresses. The sands below alive with tennis players, children making sand-castles, and loungers, and bathers, and horses moving among the bathing-machines. Yvonne tripped along with careless tread. Her heart was in harmony with the brightness and movement and the glint of the sun on the sea. Once a man, meeting her smiling glance, hesitated as if to speak to her, but seeing that the smile was addressed to the happy world in general, he passed on his way. It was easy to kill time. She went down the Rue Flammande and looked at the shops. The jewelry and the models of Paris dresses delighted her. The display of sweets at Nopenny's allured her within. When she returned to the *digue*, it was time to seek the Canon at the Kursaal.

The liveried attendants lifted their hats as she ran up the steps and passed the barrier. She gave them a smiling "*bonjour*." Neither the Canon nor any of the friends being visible

on the verandah, she entered the great hall, where the morning instrumental concert was going on. She scanned the talking, laughing crowd as she passed through. Many eyes followed her. For Yvonne, when happy, was sweet to look upon. She was turning back to retrace her steps, when, suddenly, a man started up from a group of three who were playing cards and drinking absinthe at a small table, and placed himself before her.

"*Tiens! c'est Yvonne!*"

She stared at him with dilated eyes and parted lips and uttered a little gasping cry. Seeing her grow deadly white and thinking she was going to faint, the man put out his arm. But Yvonne was mistress of herself.

"*Allons d'ici*," she whispered, turning a terrified glance around.

The man raised his hat to his companions and signed to her to come. He was a handsome, careless, dissipated-looking fellow, with curly hair and a twirled black moustache; short and slightly made. He wore a Tyrolese hat and a very low turned-down collar and a great silk bow outside his waistcoat. There was a devil-may-care charm in his swagger as he walked — also an indefinable touch of

vulgarity; the type of the *cabotin* in easy circumstances.

Yvonne, more dead than alive, followed him through the deserted *salle des jeux* on to the quiet bit of verandah, and sank into a chair that he offered. She looked at him, still white to the lips.

"You?"

"Yes," he said laughingly, "why not? It is not astonishing."

"But I thought you dead!" gasped Yvonne, trembling.

"*A la bonne heure!* And I seem a ghost. Oh, I am solid. Pinch me. But how did you come to learn? Ah! I remember it was given out in Paris. A *canard*. It was in the hospital — paralysis, *ma chère*. See, I can only just move my arm now. *C'était la verte, cette sacrée verte* —"

"Absinthe?" asked Yvonne, almost mechanically.

He nodded, went through the motions of preparing the drink, and laughed.

"I had a touch lately," he went on. "That was the second. The third I shall be *prrrt* — *flambé!* They tell me to give it up. Never in life."

"But if it will kill you?"

"Bah. What do I care? When one lives, one amuses oneself. And I have well amused myself, eh, Yvonne? For the rest, *je m'en fiche!*"

He went on talking with airy cynicism. To Yvonne it seemed some horrible dream. The husband she had looked upon as dead was before her, gay, mocking, just as she had known him of old. And he greeted her after all these years with the same lightness as he had bidden her farewell.

"*Et toi, Yvonne?*" said he at length. "*Ça roule toujours?* You look as if you were brewing money. Ravishing costume. *Crêpon* — not twenty-five centimes a yard! A hat that looks like the Rue de la Paix! *Gants de reine et petites bottines de duchesse!* You must be doing golden business. But speak, *petite*, since I assure you I am not a ghost!"

Yvonne forced a faint smile. She tried to answer him, but her heart was thumping violently and a lump rose in her throat.

"I am doing very well, Amédée," she said.

The dreadfulness of her position came over her. She felt sick and faint. What was going to happen? For some moments she

did not hear him as he spoke. At last perception returned.

"And you are pretty," Amédée Bazouge was saying. "*Mais jolie à croquer* — prettier than you ever were. And I — I am going down the hill at the gallop. *Tiens*, Yvonne. Let us celebrate this meeting. Come and see me safe to the bottom. It won't be long. I have money. I am always *bon enfant*. Let us remarry. From to-day. *Ce serait rigolo!* And I will love you — *mais énormément!*"

"But I am already married!" cried Yvonne.

"Thinking me dead?"

"Yes."

He looked at her for a few seconds, then slapped his thigh and, rising from his chair, bent himself double and gave vent to a roar of laughter. The tears stood in Yvonne's eyes.

"Oh, but it's comic. You don't find it so?"

He leant back against the railings and laughed again in genuine merriment.

"Why, it's all the more reason to come back to me. *Ça y met du salé.* Have you any children?"

Yvonne shook her head.

"*Eh bien!*" he exclaimed, triumphantly,

stepping towards her with outstretched hands. But she shrank from him, outraged and bewildered.

"Never, never!" she cried. "Go away. Have pity on me, for God's sake!"

Amédée Bazouge shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"It's a comedy, not a tragedy, *ma chère*. If you are happy, I am not going to be a spoil-sport. It is not my way. Be tranquil with your good fat Englishman — I bet he's an Englishman — In two years — bah! I can amuse myself always till then — my poor little Yvonne. No wonder I frightened you."

The affair seemed to cause him intense amusement. A ray of light appeared to Yvonne.

"You won't interfere with me at all, Amédée — not claim anything?"

"Oh, don't be afraid. *Dès ce moment je vais me reflanquer au sapin!* I shall be as dead as dead can be for you. *Suis pas méchant, va!*"

"Thank you," said Yvonne. "You were always kind-hearted, Amédée — oh, it was a horrible mistake — it can't be altered. You see that I am helpless."

"Why, my child," said he, seating himself

again, "I keep on telling you it is a farce — like all the rest of life. I only laugh. And now let us talk a little before I pop into the coffin again. What is the name of the thrice happy being?"

"Oh, don't ask me, I beg you," said Yvonne shivering. "It is all so painful. Tell me about yourself — your voice — Is it still in good condition?"

"Never better. I am singing here this afternoon."

"In the Kursaal?"

"Why, yes. That's why I am here. Oh, *ça marche — pas encore paralysée, celle-là.* Come and hear me. *Et ton petit organe à toi?*"

"I am out of practice. I have given up the profession."

"Ah, it's a pity. You had such an exquisite little voice. I regretted it after we parted. Two or three times it nearly brought me back to you — *foi d'artiste!*"

"I think I must go," said Yvonne after a little. "I am leaving Ostend to-morrow and I shall not see you again. You don't think I am treating you unkindly, Amédée?"

He laughed in his bantering way and lit a cigarette.

"On the contrary, *cher ange*. It is very good of you to talk to a poor ghost. And you look so pathetic, like a poor little saint with its harp out of tune."

She rose, anxious to leave him and escape into solitude, where she could think. She still trembled with agitation. In the little cool park, on the other side of the square below, she could be by herself. She dreaded meeting the Canon yet awhile.

"Do give up that vile absinthe," she said, as a parting softness.

"It is the only consoler that remains to me — sad widower."

"Well, good-bye, Amédée."

"Ah — not yet. Since you are the wife of somebody else, I am dying to make love to you."

He held her by the wrist, laughing at her. But at that moment Yvonne caught sight of the Canon and Mrs. Winstanley, entering upon the terrace. She wrenched her arm away.

"There is my husband."

"*Nom de Dieu!*" cried Bazouge, stifling a guffaw before the austere decorum of the English churchman. "*Ça?* Oh, my poor

Yvonne!" She shook hands rapidly with him and turned away. He bowed gracefully, including the new-comers in his salute. The Canon responded severely. Mrs. Winstanley stared at him through her tortoise-shell lorgnette.

"We have been looking all over the place for you," said the Canon, as they passed through the window into the *salle des jeux*, leaving Bazouge in the corner of the verandah.

"I'm sorry," said Yvonne penitently.

"And who was that rakish-looking little Frenchman you were talking to?"

"An old friend — I used to know him," said Yvonne, struggling with her agitation. "A friend of my first husband — I had to speak to him — we went there to be quiet. I could n't help it, Everard, really I could n't."

"My dear child," said the Canon, kindly, "I was not scolding you — though he did look rather undesirable."

"I suppose you had to mix with all kinds of odd Bohemian people in your professional days?" said Mrs. Winstanley.

"Of course," faltered Yvonne.

They went through the great hall. At the door they parted with Mrs. Winstanley, who

was waiting for the Wilmingtons. "We will call for you on our way to the concert this afternoon," said the Canon.

"Thanks," said Mrs. Winstanley, and then, suddenly looking at Yvonne —

"Mercy, my dear! How white you are!"

"There's nothing the matter with me," said Yvonne, trying to smile.

"It's past our *déjeuner* hour," said the Canon, briskly. "You want some food."

"Perhaps I do," said Yvonne.

She went with the Canon on to the *digue*, and walked along the shady side, by the hotels, past the gay terraces thronged with lunching guests. But all the glamour had gone from the place. An hour had changed it. And that hour seemed a black abyss separating her from happiness.

An hour ago she had looked upon this kind, grave man who walked by her side as her husband. Now what was he to her? She shrank from the thought, terrified, and came nearer to him, touching the flying skirt of his coat as if to take strength from him.

They entered the crowded dining-room, where the *maître d'hôtel* had reserved them a table. She struggled bravely through part of

the meal, strove to keep up a conversation. But the strain was too great. Another five minutes, she felt, would make her hysterical. She rose, with an excuse to the Canon, and escaped to her room.

There she flung herself down on the bed and buried her face in the cool pillows. It was a relief to be alone with her fright and dismay. She strove to think, but her head was in a whirl. The incidents of the late scene came luridly before her mind, and she shivered with revulsion. A rough hand had been laid on the butterfly and brushed the dust from its wings.

The Canon came later to her room, kindly solicitous. Was she ill? Would she like to see a medical man? Should he sit with her? She clasped his hand impulsively and kissed it.

"You are too good to me. I am not worth it. I am not ill. It was the sun, I think. Let me lie down this afternoon by myself and I shall be better."

Surprised and touched by her action, he bent down and kissed her.

"My poor little wife."

He stepped to the window and pulled the

curtain to shield her eyes from the glare, and promising to order some tea to be brought up later, he went out.

The kiss, the term, and the little act of thoughtfulness comforted her, gave her a sense of protection. She had been so bruised and frightened. Now she could think a little. Should she tell Everard? Then she broke down again and began to cry silently in a great soothing pity for herself.

"It would only make him unhappy," she moaned. "Why should I tell him?"

She grew calmer. If Amédée would only keep his promise and leave her free, there was really nothing to fret about. She reassured herself with his words. Through all his failings toward her he had ever been "*bon enfant.*" There was no danger.

Suddenly a thought came that made her spring from her bed in dismay. The concert. She had forgotten that Amédée was singing there. Everard was going. He would see the name on the programme, "Amédée Bazouge." There could not be two tenors of that name in Europe. Everard must be kept away at all costs.

She rushed from the room and down the

stairs, in terrible anxiety lest he should have already left the hotel. To her intense relief, she saw him sitting in one of the cane chairs in the vestibule smoking his after-lunch cigar. He threw it away as he caught sight of her at the head of the stairs, breathless, and holding the balusters, and went up to meet her.

"My poor child," said he in an anxious tone. "What is the matter?"

"Oh, Everard — I don't want any more to be left alone. Don't think me silly and cowardly. I am afraid of all kinds of things."

"Of course I'll come and sit with you a little," he replied kindly.

They entered her room together. Yvonne lay down. Her head was splitting with nervous headache. The Canon tended her in his grave way and sat down by the window with a book. Yvonne felt very guilty, but yet comforted by his presence. At the end of an hour, he looked at his watch and rose from his seat.

"Are you easier now?"

"You are not going to the Kursaal, Everard?"

"I am afraid Emmeline is expecting me."

She signed to him to approach, and put her arms round his neck.

"Don't go. Send her an excuse — and take me for a drive. It would do me good, and I should so love to be alone with you."

It was the very first time in her life that Yvonne had consciously cajoled a man. Her face flushed hot with misgivings. It was with a mixture of her sex's shame and triumph that she heard him say.

"Whatever you like, dear. It is still your holiday."

CHAPTER XIII

Dis Aliter Visum

But the best laid schemes of Yvonnes and men often come to nothing. While she was devising, on her drive along the coast, a plan for spending a quiet dangerless evening at the hotel, Mrs. Winstanley was sitting in solitary dignity at the concert, nursing her wrath over Professor Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual world," a book which she often perused when she wished to accentuate the rigorous attitude of her mind.

Yvonne had reckoned without Mrs. Winstanley. Otherwise she would have offered her a seat in the carriage. As it was, Mrs. Winstanley felt more resentful than ever. Under the impression that the Canon was to accompany her to the Kursaal, she had graciously dispensed with the escort of the Wilmingtons, who had gone off to see bicycle races at the Vélodrome. She was left in the lurch.

To dislike this is human. To wrap oneself up in one's sore dignity is more human still, and there was much humanity that lurked, unsuspected by herself, in Mrs. Winstanley's bosom. It asserted itself, further, in certain curiosities. She had seen that morning what had escaped the Canon's notice — the stranger's grasp on Yvonne's arm and the insolent admiration on his face. This fact, coupled with Yvonne's agitation, had put her upon the track of scandal. The result was, that at the concert she made interesting discoveries, and, piecing things together in her mind afterwards, bided her time to make use of them.

It would be for the Canon's sake, naturally. A woman of Mrs. Winstanley's stamp is always the most disinterested of God's creatures. She never performed an action of which her conscience did not approve. But she was such a superior woman that her conscience trembled a little before her, like most of the other friends whom she patronised. She did not have to wait long. The Canon called upon her soon after his return to invite herself and the Wilmingtons to dinner. It was his last evening at Ostend, and Yvonne was not feeling well enough to spend it, as usual, at the Kursaal.

"Yvonne is still poorly, Everard?" she asked, with her air of confidential responsibility.

"A little. She has been gadding about somewhat too much lately, and it has knocked her up."

"Has it not occurred to you that her encounter this morning may have had something to do with it?"

"Of course not," replied the Canon, sharply. "It would be ridiculous."

"I have reasons for not thinking so, Everard. The man was singing at the Kursaal this afternoon. Here is his name on the programme." She handed him the slip of paper. He read the name among the artistes. "M. Bazouge." He returned it to her.

"Well?"

"Does it not seem odd to you?"

"Not at all. A relation of her first husband's, I suppose. In fact Yvonne said as much."

"I could not help being struck by the name, Everard. It is so peculiar. I remembered it from the publication of the banns."

"I compliment you on your memory, Emmeline," said the Canon.

Mrs. Winstanley drew herself up, offended.

She walked from the window where they were standing to a table, and fetched from it a newspaper.

"Do you remember the Christian name of Yvonne's first husband?"

The Canon drew himself up too, and frowned.

"What is the meaning of all this, Emmeline? What are you trying to insinuate?"

"If I thought you were going to adopt this tone, Everard, I should have kept my suspicions to myself."

"I certainly wish that you had," said he, growing angry. "It is an insult to Yvonne which I cannot permit. My wife is above suspicion."

"Like Cæsar's," said the lady with a curl of the lip. "Do you know that we are beginning to quarrel, Everard? It is slightly vulgar. I am your oldest friend, remember, and I am trying to acquit myself of a painful duty to you."

"Duty is one of the chief instruments of the devil, if you will excuse my saying so," replied the Canon.

"Oh, very well then, Everard," she said hotly. "You can go on being a fool as long as you like. I saw your wife struggling in this man's

embrace, more or less, this morning. Two or three strange coincidences have been forced upon my notice. For your sake I have been excessively anxious. My conscience tells me I ought to take you into my confidence, and I can do no more. You can see the Christian name of this Bazouge in the Visitors' List, and adopt what course of action you think fit. I wash my hands of the whole matter. And I must say that from the very beginning, two years ago, you have treated me all through with the greatest want of consideration."

The Canon did not heed the peroration. He stood with the flimsy sheet clenched in his hand and regarded her sternly. She shrank a little, for her soul seemed to be naked.

"You have tried to ferret this out through spite against Yvonne. Whether the horrible thing you imply is true or not, I shall find it hard to forgive you."

Mrs. Winstanley shrugged her shoulders.

"In either case, you will come to your senses, I hope. Meanwhile, considering the present relations, it might be pleasanter not to meet at dinner to-night."

"I am sorry to have to agree with you, Emmeline," said the Canon.

She made him a formal bow and was leaving the room; but his voice stopped her.

"Your anxiety cannot be very great, or you would wait to learn whether your suspicions are baseless or not."

She paused, in a dignified attitude, with her hand on the back of a chair, while he adjusted his gold pince-nez and ran through the list.

"You are right so far," he said coldly. "The names are identical."

They parted at the door. The Canon walked back to his hotel with anger in his heart. In spite of cumulative evidence, the theory that his cousin had insinuated was prima facie preposterous. It was important enough, however, to need some investigation. But the feeling uppermost in his mind was indignation with Mrs. Winstanley. He was too shrewd a man not to have perceived long ago her jealousy of Yvonne; but beyond keeping a watchful eye lest his wife should receive hurt, he had not condescended to take it into serious consideration. Now, beneath her impressive manner he clearly divined the desire to inflict on Yvonne a deadly injury. To have leaped at such a conclusion, to have sought subsequent proof from the Visitors'

List, argued malicious design. He could never forgive her.

Still the matter had to be cleared up at once. On his arrival at the Océan, he went forthwith to Yvonne's room, and entered on receiving an acknowledgment of his knock. She was standing in the light of the window by the toilet table, doing her hair. The rest of the room was in the shadow of the gathering evening.

"Well," she said, without turning, "are they coming?"

The grace of her attitude, the intimacy of the scene, the pleasantness of her greeting, made his task hateful.

"No," he said, with an asperity directed towards the dis-invited guest. "We shall dine alone to-night."

But his tone made Yvonne's heart give a great throb, and she turned to him quickly.

"Has anything happened?"

"A great deal," said the Canon.

Where he stood in the dusk of the doorway, the shadow accentuated the stern lines of his face and deepened the sombreness of his glance. His brows were bent in perplexities of repugnance. It was horrible to demand of her such

explanations. To Yvonne's scared fancy, his brows seemed bent in accusation. That was the pity of it. For a few seconds they looked at one another, the Canon severely, Yvonne in throbbing suspense.

"What?" she asked at length.

He paused for a moment, then threw his hat and the crumpled Visitors' List on to the table and plunged into the heart of things — but not before Yvonne had glanced at the paper with a sudden pang of intuition.

"Emmeline has discovered, Yvonne, that the man —"

He got no further. Yvonne rushed to him with a cry of pain, clung to his arm, broke into wild words.

"Don't say any more — don't — don't. Spare me — for pity's sake. I did not want you to know. I tried to keep it from you, Everard! Don't look at me like that?"

Her voice ended in a note of fright. For the Canon's face had grown ashen and wore an expression of incredulous horror. He shook her from him.

"Do you mean that this is true? That you met your first husband this morning?"

"Yes," said she, with quivering lips Ques-

tion and answer were too categorical for misunderstanding. For a moment he struggled against the overwhelming.

"Are you in your right senses, Yvonne? Do you understand what I asked you? Your first husband is still alive and you saw him to-day?"

"Yes," said Yvonne again. "Didn't you know when you came in?"

"I didn't know," he repeated almost mechanically.

The blow crushed him for a while. He stood quite rigid, drawing quick breaths, with his eyes fixed upon her. And she remained still, half-sitting on the edge of the bed, numb with a vague prescience of catastrophe, and a dim, uncomprehended intuition of the earthquake and wreck in the man's soul. The silence grew appalling. She broke it with a faltering whisper.

"Will you forgive me?"

The poor little commonplace fell in the midst of devastating emotions — pathetically incongruous.

"Did you know that this man was alive when you married me?" he asked in a hard voice.

"No," cried Yvonne. "How could I have married you? I thought he had been dead nearly three years."

"What proofs did you have of his death?"

"A friend sent me a number of the Figaro, with the announcement."

"Was that all?"

"Yes," said Yvonne.

"Do you mean to tell me," he insisted, "that you married a second time, having no further proofs of your first husband's death than a mere newspaper report?"

"It never occurred to me to doubt it," she replied, opening piteous, innocent eyes.

The childlike irresponsibility was above his comprehension. Her apparent insensibility to the most vital concerns of life was another shock to him. It seemed criminal.

"God forgive you," he said, "for the wrong you have done me."

"But I did it unknowingly, Everard," cried poor Yvonne. "If one has to get greater proofs, why did you not ask for them, yourself?"

The Canon turned away and paced the room slowly, without replying. At last he stood still before her.

"Among ordinary honourable people one takes such things for granted," he said.

"Forgive me," she said again, humbly.

But he could find no pity for her in his heart. She had wronged him past redemption.

"How much truth was there in the newspaper story?" he asked coldly.

She told him rapidly what Amédée Bazouge had said concerning his attack in the hospital and his subsequent stroke.

"So the man is wilfully killing himself with absinthe?" he said.

"It appears so," replied Yvonne with a shudder.

"Could you tell me what passed between you otherwise — in general terms?" he asked, after a short silence. "You explained your position? Or did you leave him in ignorance, as you were going to leave me?"

"I told him — of course. It was necessary. And he laughed — I thought to spare you, Everard."

"Spare me, Yvonne?"

"Yes," she said, simply, "I could have borne all the pain and fright of it alone — why should I have made you unhappy? And *he* said he would never interfere with me, and I

can trust his word. Why should I have told you, Everard?"

"Do you actually ask me such a question, honestly?"

"God knows I do," she replied pitifully.

"And you would have gone on living with me — I not being your husband?"

"But you are my husband," cried Yvonne, "nothing could ever alter that."

"But good God! it does alter it," cried the Canon in a voice of anguish, breaking the iron bonds he had placed on his passion. "Neither in the eyes of God nor of man are you my wife. You have no right to bear my name. After this hour I have no right to enter this room. Every caress I gave you would be sin. Don't you understand it, child? Don't you understand that this has brought ruin into our lives, the horror of loneliness and separation?"

"Separation?" said Yvonne.

She rose slowly from her seat on the bed and stared at him aghast.

The twilight in the room deepened; the shadow of a wall opposite the window fell darker. Their faces and Yvonne's bare neck and arms gleamed white in the gloom. They

had spoken with many silences; for how long neither knew.

"Yes," replied the Canon in his harder tones, recovering himself. "It means all that."

"I am to go — not to live with you any more?"

"Could you imagine our past relations could continue?"

"I don't understand," she began feebly. And then the darkness fell upon her, and her limbs relaxed. She swayed sideways and would have fallen, but he caught her in his arms and laid her on the couch.

"Thank you," she murmured faintly.

She hid her face in her hands and remained, crouched up, quite still, in a stupor of misery. The Canon stood over her helplessly, unable to find a word of comfort.

The sight of her prostration did not move him. He had been wounded to the very depths of his being. His pride, his honour, his dignity were lacerated in their vitals. He burned with the sense of unpardonable wrong.

"It is self-evident," he said at last, "that we must part. Our remaining together would be a sin against God and an outrage upon Society."

She raised herself wearily, with one hand on the couch, and shook her head slowly.

"Such things are beyond me. No one will ever know."

"There is One who will always know, Yvonne."

She pondered over the saying, as far as her tired, bewildered brain allowed. It conveyed very little meaning to her. Theology had not altered her child-like conception of the benevolence of the Creator. After a long time she was able to disentangle an idea from the confusion.

"If it is a sin — don't you love me enough to sin a little for my sake?"

"Not that sin," he said.

Yvonne lifted her shoulders helplessly.

"I would commit any sin for your sake," she said. "It would seem so easy."

Curiously assorted as they were, a poetic idealism on the one side and grateful veneration on the other had hitherto bound them together. Now they were sundered leagues apart; mutual understanding was hopeless. Each was bewildered by the other's moral attitude.

The logical consequences of the discovery, that appeared so luridly devious to the Canon's

intellect, failed entirely to appeal to Yvonne. She referred them entirely to his personal inclinations. On the other hand, the Canon had a false insight into her soul that was a chilling disillusion.

The beauty of her exquisite purity and innocence had always captivated in him the finer man. It was a mirage. It was gone. Emptiness remained. She was simply a graceful, non-moral being — a spiritual anomaly.

Yvonne shivered, and rising, walked unsteadily to the wardrobe, whence she took a dressing-jacket. Putting it on, she returned to the couch. It was almost dark. The Canon watched her dim, slight figure as it passed him, with a strange feeling of remoteness. A hundred trivial instances of her want of moral sense crowded into his mind to support his view — her inability to see the wrong-doing of Stephen, her indefinite notions in religious matters, her mental attitude toward the girl that had gone astray, of whom she had been talking only the night before, her expressed intention of hiding this terrible discovery from him. He had been duped, not by her, but by his own romantic folly.

Yet what would his life be without her — or

rather without his illusion? An icy hand gripped his heart. He turned to the glimmering window and stared at the blank wall.

Presently a moan struck upon his ear. He wheeled round sharply, and distinguished her lying with helpless outspread arms on the couch. Mere humanity brought him to her side.

"I am so tired," she moaned.

"You must go to bed," he replied in a gentler voice than hitherto. "We had better part now. To-morrow, if you are well enough to travel, we will leave for England."

"Let me go alone," she murmured, "and you go on to Switzerland. Why should your holiday be spoiled?"

"It is my life that is spoiled," he said ungenerously. "The holiday matters very little. It is best to return to England as soon as possible. Between now and to-morrow morning I shall have time to reflect upon the situation."

He struck a match and lit the candles and drew down the blind. The light revealed her to him so wan and exhausted that he was moved with compunction.

"Don't think me hard, my child," he said,

bending over her. "It is the bitterest day of our lives. We must pray to God for strength to bear it. I shall leave you now. I shall see that you have all you want. Try to sleep. Good-night."

"Good-night," she said miserably.

And so, without touch of hand, they parted.

The hours of the evening wore on, and night came. At last she cried herself to sleep. It had been a day of tears.

They left Ostend quietly the following morning by the Dover boat. During the whole journey the Canon treated Yvonne with the deferential courtesy he could always assume to women, seeing to her comforts, anticipating her wants, even exchanging now and then casual remarks on passing objects of interest. But of the subject next his heart he said not a word. The crossing was smooth. The sea air revived Yvonne's strength.

His silence half comforted, half frightened her. Had he relented? She glanced often at his impassive face, in cruel anxiety to pierce to the thoughts that lay behind. Yet a little hope came to her; for fear of losing it she dared not speak. To her simple mind it seemed impossible that merely conscientious scruples

could make him cast her off. If he loved her, his love would triumph. If he persisted in his resolve, he cared for her no longer. In this case her future was very simple. She would go back to London and sing.

She seemed to have cried her feeling away during the night — such as he had left unbruised and untorn. For the quivering flesh is only sensitive up to a certain point of maceration. He had trodden upon her pitilessly; but she felt no resentment. In fact, she would have been quite happy if he had put his arms round her and said, "Let us forget, Yvonne." By the end of the journey she had cajoled herself into the idea that he would do so.

A suite of rooms received them in the quiet West End hotel where the Canon always stayed. They dined alone, the discreet butler waiting on them, for the Canon was an honoured guest. When the cloth was removed, the Canon said in his even voice: —

"Are you sufficiently recovered, Yvonne, to discuss this painful subject?"

"I am quite ready, Everard."

"We will make it as short as possible. What I said last night must remain, whatever be the suffering. I have loved you deeply —

like a young man — in a way perhaps ill befitting my years. The memories, for they are innocent, will always be there, Yvonne. If I did not seek strength from Elsewhere, it might wreck my life to part from you."

Her hope was dashed to the ground. She interrupted him with one more appeal. "Why need we part, Everard?" she said, in a low voice. "I mean, why cannot we live in the same house — before the world —?"

"It is impossible," he replied. "You don't know what you are asking."

His voice grew husky. He paused a few seconds, then, recovering himself, continued in the same hard tones: —

"As we must live apart, it is my duty to make provision for you. I shall alter my will, securing to you what would have come to you as my wife. During my lifetime I shall make you an allowance in fair proportion to my means. And it will be, of course, unconditional."

Then, for the first time, her gentle nature rose up in revolt against him.

"I could not accept it, Everard," she cried with kindling cheeks. "If I have no right to bear your name I have no right to your

support. Don't ask me to take it, for I can't."

"Yvonne, listen to me—"

"No," she went on passionately, "I am speaking as a woman now; the time has come, and you were right in your prophecy—I would sooner die than live away from you and be supported by you. You don't understand—it is as if I had done something shameful and you were putting me away from you. Oh, don't speak of it,—don't speak of it. If I am not your wife before God, I have no claims on you."

"To hear you speak like that pains me intensely," he said. "Do you think I have lost all regard for you?"

"If you loved me, you would not wish to part from me," said Yvonne with her terrible logic.

They were on different planes of thought and feeling. The Canon argued, insisted, but to no purpose. Yvonne was inconvincible.

The talk continued, drifted away for a time to arrangements for the immediate future. A reply telegram came from Geraldine Vicary, to the effect that she would be with Yvonne in the morning. It was settled that Yvonne should

stay with her provisionally, and that she, in order to avoid painful meetings and communications, should be Yvonne's agent in the necessary settlement of affairs. Finally, the Canon returned to the subject of the allowance. He would settle a certain sum upon her, whether she would accept it or not. Yvonne flashed again into rebellion. The idea was hateful to her. He had no right to make her lose her self-respect.

"But it is my solemn duty that I must perform. Will nothing I can say ever make you understand?" he exclaimed at last, in exasperation.

Yvonne rose and came to where he sat, and laid her hand upon his shoulder with an action full of tenderness, and looked down upon him with her wistful dark eyes, all the more wistful for the rings beneath them.

"Don't be angry with me — over last evening. It is good and generous of you to wish to make provision for me. But I shall be much happier to feel myself no burden upon you. And it will be so easy for me to earn my living again. I shall be much happier, really."

The little word, with which she so often

confirmed her statements, the familiar touch of her hand, the sense of her delicate, fragile figure so near him caused a spasm of pain to pass through his heart; disillusion had not touched his common, human want of her. He bowed his head in his hands.

"Some day, Yvonne, it may be possible for me to ask you — to come back. If I give in to your wishes now, will you give in to mine then?"

The emotion in his voice was too strong to escape her. It stirred all the yielding sweetness and tender pity of Yvonne. She forgot the reproaches, the pitilessness, the religious scruples comprehended only as unloving. His broad shoulders shook beneath her touch.

"I will come whenever you want me," she said.

"If I have been ungenerous in word or thought to you, Yvonne, forgive me."

Her hand strayed shyly to a lock of grizzling hair above his temples and smoothed it back gently.

He raised his head, and looked at her for a second or two with an expression of anguish.

Then he sprang to his feet, and before Yvonne, shrinking back, could realise his in-

He was a religious man, when he was not drunk, and set great store by a prayer-book that he had saved from the wreckage of church-going times. Over a fat, phlegmatic, brick-red face the sun had spread a glaze, as if to shield the colour from other counteracting climatic influences. His speech was thick and uneducated. At first Joyce had resented his intention as a mockery, and only to avoid unseemly wrangling did he stand there and listen, while the Kaffir squatted by, scratching his limbs in meditative wonder at the incantation. But very soon the solemn beauty of the service appealed to him. "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." He stooped and threw some handfuls of the red soil reverently into the grave. It seemed not unfitting that the rude voice should give the broken life this rude burial.

The service over, Wilson signed to the Kaffir to fill in the grave, and flicking the perspiration from his forehead, for the sun beat down fiercely, turned to Joyce.

"Come in now and have a drink."

But Joyce refused and remained there alone, with his head sunk on his breast, watching the Kaffir. When the task was done, he set at the

grave-head a great stone he had previously brought there, and slowly went away. His steps took him mechanically back over the *kopje*. But when he arrived at the prickly-pear hedge on top, the sight of the mean shanty and the Kaffir huts and the straggling fields high with corn and maize, jarred upon his mood. He turned, and descending, struck across the rank, sodden veldt, that stretched eastward in a terrible monotony to the sky-line. There, at any rate, he could be alone, away from the sights and sounds of his dreary toil. A broad gully, half filled with a red, swollen stream, stopped his progress. Half a mile farther up was a bridge. But he was tired and hot and sick at heart. A slab in the shade of an overhanging edge of the ravine met his eye. He clambered down and sat there, looking into the small swirling flood.

A centipede crawled close by. He drew his knife from his belt, cut the creature in two, and flicked the pieces into the water, which swept them instantaneously out of sight. He looked at his knife that had so speedily given death to the insect. Was he much better, more useful? One gash, a leap into the stream, and he would be carried away into eternity. Till yesterday

his life had some meaning — the support of the poor forlorn man just buried. Now, what was the good of his living? There was no joy for himself, no service to one of God's creatures. But after digging his knife idly into the crumbling slab, he returned it to his belt.

Yet what he had dreaded with almost morbid heart-sinking these latter months had come about. He was alone. Noakes had gone — passed away like a shadow, as the burial service hath it. The phrase brought back to his mind a tag from old days of scholarship — "σκιᾶς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος — man is the dream of a shadow." He mused upon the saying. Time was, he remembered, when he had wondered at the strange Greek melancholy underlying even Pindar's gladness in outward things, thews and sinews and supple forms. Now he understood. What sane man who had watched the world could escape it — this overwhelming sense of the futility of things? To what ends had Noakes's life been lived? The ceaseless awful toil of grinding out despicable literature at sweated wages; the begetting of a child to an inheritance of misery in the world's tragedy; the crowning futility of his senseless exile — what purpose had it all served? Save for the pity

of it, could it be taken seriously? And he himself dangling his legs over this gully? Verily, the dream of a shadow.

The lines in which the passage occurred came into his head. He repeated them aloud. Such reminiscences of former culture occasionally visited him and smote him with their ironic incongruity. He broke into a mirthless laugh.

The westering sun had already touched the top of the far distant High Veldt when he turned his steps homeward.

Wilson was squirting tobacco juice over a gate and giving directions as to the repairing of one of the sluices, that drained the land into the gully, whence Joyce had come.

"This damn thing will all go to glory soon," he said.

"We ought to get some pipes," said Joyce.

"And lay on gas and hot-water," returned Wilson, sarcastically. "Where's the money to come from?"

Joyce shrugged his shoulders and continued his way to the house. He did not much care. Things were going badly. Well, things had gone badly with him since he stepped aside from the paths of honest living. He could expect nothing else.

The sight of the rough bed, tenantless now for the first time for many months, was inexpressibly cheerless. The indentations too of the coffin still remained upon it. He smoothed them out mechanically. Then reaching for a thick pile of foolscap that was on the shelf, he sat down with it upon the bed. It was the MS. of the novel which Noakes had copied from the yellow package-paper — all written in his beautiful round hand. He had been a writing master in his youth and retained a professional pride in penmanship. For months this copying had been all he could do.

Joyce read here and there, at last became interested. The work was good. And then for the first time he seriously contemplated mailing it to a publisher. When the Kaffir came in later to help him prepare supper, he had made up his mind.

It was a gloomy book, dealing with the abject side of colonial pioneer work — a tragedy of wasted lives and hopes foredoomed to disappointment. A picture of wrecks and derelicts; men of broken fortunes, breaking hearts, degraded lives; poor fools, penniless, craftless, who had come hither like Noakes, allured by vague visions of El Dorado, to

find no place for them in this new rude land where unskilled labour belongs to the natives, who defy competition. He called it "The Wasters." Almost unconsciously, his intellectual powers had returned to him whilst writing it. The English was pure, the style vigorous and scholarly. And the feeling—he had written it with his heart's blood. Before he went to sleep that night, he appended to it an alternative title, "The Dream of a Shadow."

In the course of time the manuscript was despatched and Joyce settled down to many months' forgetfulness of it, and to humdrum loneliness and labour. Time went quickly, for he took no heed of its flight, having nothing to hope for. He tried to begin another book, but the stimulus of Noakes's appreciation was gone and he sank again into intellectual apathy. In the long evenings he taught a Kaffir boy to read and write, while Wilson boozed away the profits of the farm. At the best of times there was little sympathy between the two men. Often mutual antipathy manifested itself actively under a thin disguise. The farmer despised Joyce for a broken-down gentleman unacquainted with any

handicraft or the principles of farming, and Joyce considered his partner a dull sot, who was letting the farm go to rack and ruin. Still, a habit of life is a strange help in living. Often Joyce told himself that he must sell out and try his luck elsewhere. But there was no particular reason for bringing matters to a crisis on one day more than on another. So the months wore on.

The work of the harvest knocked him up. He got ague and lay in bed for three weeks. Wilson cursed the day he ever took him into the place; and had it not been for the humaneness of their next neighbour, who farmed more healthy ground some forty miles away, towards the High Veldt, and carried Joyce off thither one day in an ox-waggon, he might have speedily followed Noakes. He returned to the farm cured but terribly gaunt. The lines had deepened in his face, over which the beard grew straggling, accentuating the hollows of his cheeks. His hands had whitened and thinned during his illness. Wilson sniffed contemptuously at them and looked at his own huge glazed and freckled paw.

Winter set in. There was plenty to do — ricks to thatch, buildings to repair, fields

to irrigate. Joyce did not spare himself. Work, if joyless, was at least an anodyne. It brought on prostrating fatigue, which in its turn brought long heavy hours of sleep. In that way it was as good as adulterated whisky.

Some men thrive physically and morally in the wilds. The incessant conflict with the elemental forces of nature braces nerves and strengthens the will. And these are exclusive of such as find satisfaction of primitive instincts only in uncivilised lands — such as are a reversion to the savage type, and, in the forest or the desert, live a life truer to their natures than amid the decencies of civilisation. But the men who thrive are physically and morally adapted to the struggle — men of energy, ambition, daring, who see in it a means towards the yet ungained or forfeited place in civilisation. The pioneer work of new colonies is done by them, and they generally gain their reward. Joyce had found all the successful men in South Africa belonging to this type. He had looked at Noakes and himself and groaned inwardly. They were doomed to perish, it seemed, by natural selection. In the case of Noakes the foreboding had been fulfilled. Would it be so with himself? His

unfitness for his environment weighed heavier day by day on his mind: all the more since the loss of the companionship that had cheered him in dark hours. A habit of brooding silence fell upon him. He spoke as little as in those awful years of prison. And as his life grew lonelier and more self-centred, softer memories faded, and those chiefly remained that had branded themselves in his brain. The gaol came back to his dreams. Once, in the shed where he had taken up his abode since the beginning of spring, he awoke in a sweating terror. The disposition of his bed as regards the window and the height of the latter from the ground corresponded with the arrangements of his cell. The nightmare held him paralysed. And this in some form or the other repeated itself at intervals, so that he was forced to rearrange his room.

He had shifted his quarters owing to the arrival of a fat Boer woman who claimed connubial relations with Wilson. The suggestion had proceeded from himself from motives of delicacy and good-nature. At first he had welcomed her in spite of unprepossessing manners and appearance, and tried to win her esteem by little acts of civility. But the lady

drank; and one day Wilson, finding her alone in Joyce's hut, whither she had come to steal whisky, grew unreasonably jealous and blacked both her eyes. After which occurrence Joyce and she let each other severely alone. He relapsed into his sombre apathy.

The life was killing him, brutalizing him. He lost even interest in the Kaffir boy's education, which had not been without its light side of amusement. Hour after hour he would sit, on summer nights, on the doorstep of his shed, pipe in mouth, elbows on knees, thinking of nothing, his mind a dull blank. Now and then he thought of Yvonne, but only in a vague, far-off way. He never wrote or felt urged to write. What was the good? And he had received no letter from Yvonne since the one that had accompanied her line to Noakes. Once, several months afterwards, one of the ox-waggons from the town had been overturned in a swollen river, and many stores including the mail had been swept away. The driver told him there had been letters for him. Possibly one from Yvonne. At the time he regretted it, but his morbid indifferentism had already begun to darken his mind. He laid conjecture dully aside. The weeks and

months passed and, with all his other longings for sweeter things, the desire for her letters died. And so the last strand wore through of the last thread that bound him to England.

As for the novel, he had long since ceased to concern himself about its fate. Probably it had been lost in transit, either going or returning. The yellow sheets on which he had written the first draft lay on the mud floor in the corner of his hut and rotted and grew mildewed with the damp.

At last, one day, like a bolt from the blue, came the publishers' letter, offering alternative terms for the book, the usual royalty the firm paid to unknown authors, or eighty pounds down for the copyright, to be paid on publication. It aroused him, with a shock, from his torpor. That night he could not sleep. He got up and wandered about the veldt through the dewy grasses, under the bright African starlight, his veins alive with a new excitement. Perhaps he had found a vocation — one to bring him money, congenial work, the right at last to take his forfeited place in a civilised land. He returned to the house at daybreak, worn out with fatigue, but throbbing with wild schemes for the future. And the following evening, as

soon as the toil of the day was over, he lit his small, smoking lamp, and sat down in feverish haste to begin a new story, the scheme of which he had half-heartedly worked out soon after Noakes's death. The copyright of the other he sold for the eighty pounds.

And then gradually the longing for England grew more insistent, until at last it took the form of a settled determination. One day he saddled a rough farm-pony and rode to the good Samaritan who had taken him in during his illness. The farmer, a hard-headed Scotchman, shook his head dubiously when Joyce unfolded his plan.

"Stick to the farm and buy Wilson out. You 'll mak' more money, and then you can retire in a few years."

"The profits are nearly swallowed up in improvements and transit," said Joyce. "It is a bare subsistence."

"That 's because you don't go the right way to work. If I had the land, I 'd make it pay soon enough."

"You are a practical farmer, and I am not, said Joyce. "Even if I desired to gain experience, it is precious little I could gain with Wilson — and I long for home again."

"That's all very well — but if you fail with your writing? I have heard it is a precarious trade."

"I'm used to failure," replied Joyce. "That's what I came into the world for. You can't say that I am a conspicuous success as a colonist."

"Sell out from Wilson, and come here," said the farmer, "on the metayer system. I will put you up to a few things."

Joyce looked round him; they were sitting on the verandah of the nicely-built house. Everything had the trim appearance of scientific English farming — the outbuildings solid and clean, the fields high with grain, the dams in perfect repair, the yard spick and span. A flower garden lay beneath him. A well-trimmed vine covered the lattice-work of the verandah. All was a striking contrast to his own ramshackle, neglected surroundings. A month ago he would have leaped at the offer. But now he declined it. He distrusted himself, his power of content. If he once put his hand to the plough, he would not be able to draw back. And he held ploughs in cordial detestation. He rode back, having thanked his friend and obtained his consent to act

as arbiter, if need were, between Wilson and himself.

A day or two later, he took advantage of a sober and quasi-friendly moment, to announce his intention to Wilson, who listened to him stolidly.

"I hope my sudden withdrawal won't cause you inconvenience," said he, politely. "If it does —"

"My good friend," replied Wilson, "I am only too damn glad to get rid of you."

"Then if you 'll give me a lump sum down for my share, and lend me a team, I 'll leave the infernal place this afternoon," said Joyce, nettled.

Wilson went into the house and came out with a roll of greasy notes.

"There," he said, "will that satisfy you? I 've been wanting to part company for a long time, and I 've kept 'em by me."

Joyce counted the notes, and to his surprise found the sum exceeded that which he himself calculated to be his due. After half an hour's joint examination of their roughly-kept accounts, he found that Wilson was right.

"You are an honest man," he said with a

smile. "It is a pity you have so many other failings."

"I can keep myself out of quod, at any rate," replied Wilson, "which is more than some people can say."

The retort was like a blow in the face. Joyce staggered under it.

"Another time don't be so devilish smart with your tongue," said Wilson. "I ain't the one to cast a man's misfortunes in his teeth, but, all the same, it 's best for a man like you to lie low."

"What the devil are you talking of?" said Joyce, fiercely.

"What 's the good of bluff? You 've given yourself away heaps of times."

"I insist upon knowing what you mean," said Joyce.

How could this man have learned his history? Noakes could not have betrayed him. For the honour of his dead comrade he could not let the matter drop. Wilson tilted back his chair and squirted a stream of tobacco-juice over the floor, which aroused the indignation of the Boer woman, who was sitting on some sacks near the door, peeling potatoes. Her lord was a beastly Englander, and a great many

other undesirable things. Wilson, who had not yet laced his heavy boots, took one off to throw at her head, but Joyce caught his arm.

"What a brute you are!" he said angrily.

Wilson broke into a laugh.

"You'd better thank Mr. Joyce for saving your beauty from being damaged," he said, pulling on the boot again.

"Now," said Joyce, as soon as domestic peace was restored, "tell me what you meant just now."

Wilson rose, went to the door and ostentatiously spat over the Boer woman's head; then he turned round to Joyce:—

"Look here," he said, "I have my hands full enough of quarrelling as it is. You'd better trek off with that waggon and a couple of niggers. And I'll give you a piece of advice. When next you shake down alongside of a man to sleep, just keep from blabbing all your private affairs to him. And that's why I wanted to be shut of you. We can do without your kind hereabouts. No wonder you were surprised to find me honest."

"I suppose I must beg your pardon," said Joyce humiliated. "I had no right to speak to you as I did."

"If you had held your tongue, I should have held mine, as I have done for the last year and a half," replied Wilson.

A few hours later Joyce stood up in the ox-waggon and looked back at the detested place that had so long been his home. It was just a speck in the midst of the cheerless plain under the irregular mound, the *kopje*, behind which poor Noakes lay buried. He drew an envelope from his pocket and looked at the blade of grass he had picked from the grave. Ashamed of his sentimentality, he twirled it between his fingers, undecided whether to throw it away or not. He ended by replacing it in his pocket. After all, it symbolised a pure, tender feeling, and he was not carrying away with him too many.

He smoked in silence through the night, under the clear stars. He was sore at heart, deeply humiliated. The buoyancy of new hopes which his little literary success had occasioned during the last few weeks, had gone. The sense of the ineffaceable stain overpowered him. It was a fatality. Go where he would, he could not hide it from the knowledge of men. In his own land, accusing fingers pointed to it at street corners. In the uttermost

ends of the earth he himself proclaimed it aloud.

To have lived for months and months under the silent contempt of this drunken woman-beating brute, to have been watched narrowly in all his business dealings — as he knew, from Wilson's nature, must have been the case — to have been forced to stand helpless, degraded before this sot, while he vaunted his one virtue, honesty — it was gall and wormwood and all things bitter.

The Southern Cross flashed down from the myriad stars in its startling splendour. The moon shone bright over the vast silent plain, limitless, broken only by the undulating mounds and the infinitely stretching clumps of karroo bushes. The camp-fire, just replenished with damp twigs and shrubs, burned sulkily and the smoke ascended in spirals into the clear air. The hooded waggon depended helplessly on its shafts. The Kaffirs, wrapped in blankets, slept beneath. The oxen, outspanned some distance off, chewed the cud in sharp, rhythmic munches The universe was still — awfully still. All gave the sense of the littleness of man and the immensity of space.

In a strange, imperious need of expansion,

Joyce threw himself down on the wet earth and clutched the grasses and cried aloud: —

"Oh, God! I have suffered enough for my sin. Take this stain and degradation from my soul."

After a while he arose, ashamed of his weakness, the futility of his appeal. Relighting his pipe, he clambered into the waggon, and sitting on the floor against the back, watched the portion of starry sky framed by the hood, until the first streaks of dawn announced the hour for inspanning the oxen again and continuing his journey.

CHAPTER XV

KNIGHT—ERRANT

For all the change about him and within him, the hand of time might have been put back four years, and the tender might have been nearing the outward bound ship, instead of the Southampton landing-stage. It was the same raw mizzling rain as when he had crossed the harbour four years before; the same wet, shivering crowd of second-class passengers, with the water streaming from waterproofs, umbrellas and hand luggage on to the sloppy deck. In his heart was the same mingling of anxiety and apathy, the same ineradicable sense of pariahdom. He had thought that the sight of England once more would have brought him a throb of gladness. It only intensified his depressing fears for the future.

The circumstances reproduced themselves with startling actuality. One of the men in charge of the tender had a great ugly seam across his face. Joyce remembered having

seen him before, in just the same attitude, with a coil of rope in his hand. Had he not awakened from a minute's dream that had covered an illusory four years of his life? He looked around, almost expecting to see Noakes, in his ridiculous curly silk hat and old frieze overcoat.

The tender came alongside the landing-stage, and he stepped ashore with the dripping crowd. The flurry of the Custom House and the transport of his meagre baggage to the railway station broke the illusion. He was in England at last, and it seemed a strange country. During the journey to London, he had the companionship of some of his fellow-travellers. At Waterloo they parted. Then he felt terribly lonely.

"Cab, sir?" asked a porter.

He was standing over his luggage, somewhat lost amid the bustle and tumult of the station. It was the late afternoon, and the platforms were hurrying with suburban passengers. The incessant movement through the blue glare of the electric light dazed his unaccustomed eyes He declined the porter's offer. Cabs were a luxury he could ill afford. Besides, one meagre Gladstone bag contained his whole pos-

sessions, and he could easily carry it. Leaving the station, he took an omnibus for Victoria, with the idea of seeking his old Pimlico lodgings. If he could not be taken in there, it would not be difficult to find a room in the neighbourhood. Still confused by the sudden transition to the midst of the roar of London, he peered through the glass sides at the wet pavements glistening in the gaslight, the shop fronts, the eternal hurrying by of vague forms, and the dash past of vehicles. From Westminster Bridge the face of Big Ben greeted him. He stared at it stupidly as long as he could see it. The light on the Clock Tower announced that the House was sitting. It was all curiously familiar, and yet he felt like an alien. There was not a soul in London to welcome his home-coming. His heart sank with the sense of loneliness. He was as infinitesimal and as isolated a unit in this seething, swarming ant-hill of humanity as amid the starry solitudes of the African veldt.

As chance willed it, he found the house in Pimlico in the same hands as before, and his old room in the attics vacant. Nothing had altered, except that it looked smaller and four years shabbier. The same discoloured blind

hung before the window, the same fly-blown texts adorned the walls. The same acrid smell of dust and ashes and earth and the unaired end of all human things met his nostrils. When he went to sleep that night, it seemed incredible that four years should have passed since he had last lain there.

In a day or two the strangeness wore off. London is in a Londoner's blood. No matter how long his exile, life there comes to him as naturally as swimming does to a swimmer after years of non-practice. He remembered how he had yearned for its sights and sounds and stimulating movement. Now they were his again, and he took a measure of content. His first care was to provide himself with some clothes; his next, to visit the publishers. A cordial reception gratified him. The book was bound to have some success. The manuscript was in the printer's hands. Publication was announced for the spring. Joyce went home lighter-hearted after the interview. It was delightful to be treated as an intellectual man once more. His prospects too were not so very gloomy. With the little capital he had brought back from South Africa and the £80 for his book, he saw himself saved from starva-

tion for two years, if he lived very, very humbly on a little over a pound a week. Meanwhile he could earn something by occasional odds and ends of writing, and also complete his second novel. He arranged his scheme of life as he walked along. He would leave his lodging punctually at a certain hour after breakfast, walk to the British Museum, write all day in the Reading Room, dine, walk home, and write or read in the evenings until it was time for bed.

Thus, as ever, his sensitive nature reflected the little ray of hope. But, as usual, it was soon eclipsed by the darkening shadow in his soul, although he set to work with dogged determination. The prospect of life-long solitude appalled him. It was the terrible part of his never-ending punishment. To a nature like his, companionship and sympathy are estentials of development. Without them it withers like a parched plant. And yet he dreaded making new acquaintances, on account of the shame that would inevitably follow if his identity and history leaked out. He accepted loneliness as his portion. There were only two people in England whom, knowing his story, he could trust to shake him by the hand

— Yvonne and the actor McKay. The latter was necessarily lost in the obscurities of his roving profession. Yvonne was married to his cousin, moving in the sphere to which beyond all others he was rigorously denied access. One day, however, when the memory of her sweet kind face came back to him, and he yearned for its bright sympathy, he wrote to her at Fulminster.

He felt somewhat cheered after he had despatched the letter. And as comfortings often come in pairs, he was further cheered by seeing in an evening paper which he bought from a stand near the pillar-box, a general article he had sent up two or three days before. It was an encouraging beginning. At any rate, London streets were more stimulating to his intellectual powers than the dull, deadening life of the African farm. He made many good resolutions during these first days in London. He would win back his lost scholarship, begin to form a humble library. On his way home he bought out of a fourpenny box an old copy of Plato's "Republic." He sat up half the night reading it.

To his surprise and disappointment, instead of a letter coming from Yvonne, his own was

returned through the Dead Letter Office. "Left Fulminster two years ago — present address unknown." He was puzzled. At the the Museum he consulted the Clergy List for the year. According to it, Canon Chisely was still Rector of Fulminster. What had happened to Yvonne?

"It must be some silly mistake," he said to himself. He wrote again; but with the same result. He thought of writing to Everard, but reflected that he too must be ignorant of Yvonne's address; also that in any case, perhaps, he would disregard his letter. There was some mystery. Both his affection for Yvonne and the novelty of a curiosity outside himself spurred his interest. A day or two afterwards, he noticed on a hoarding an advertisement of cheap excursion trains to the great provincial town next to Fulminster. The journey would be very inexpensive. Why should he not go down and pick up what information he could? The idea of the little excitement pleased him.

He started the next morning at a very early hour, and arrived at Fulminster about noon. The place was well known to him. He had often visited his cousin in days gone by.

Many bitter-sweet associations crowded upon him as he walked up from the station through the streets.

He went on, without any definite idea as to his course of action. Almost mechanically he bent his steps toward the old abbey, whose spire rose above the housetops, at the end of the High Street. Soon the great mass towered above him. He stood for a while looking upwards at the wealth of tracery, and crocket, and pinnacle, feeling its beauty, and then wandered idly round. At last his eye fell upon a notice on the board by the vestry door. It was signed "J. Abdy, Rector;" other notices bore the same signature. This was a new surprise. Wondering what had occurred, he left the Abbey Close and proceeded round the familiar path to the front door of the Rectory. He would take the bull by the horns.

"Is the Rector in?" he asked the servant who opened to him.

"Yes, sir."

"Could I see him for a moment?"

"What name, sir?"

"Chisely," said Joyce, instinctively, then he coloured. It was odd that he should have been taken off his guard.

The servant showed him into the library. A glance proved that Everard no longer inhabited it. No trace of the dilettante was visible in its homely comfort. Presently the door opened, and the Rector, a kindly grey-bearded man, entered the room. Joyce made his apology for intrusion.

"I came down expecting to find Canon Chisely. I am a distant relation of his, not long come from abroad."

"I fear you have come on a vain errand," said the Rector with a smile. "He took over his diocese in New Zealand some months ago."

"His diocese?" repeated Joyce.

"Dear me, have n't you heard? Canon Chisely accepted the bishopric of Taroofa at the beginning of the year."

"How very extraordinary!" said Joyce, nonplussed. But the other took his remark literally.

"Yes, it is singular. Most people think he has thrown himself away. A very able man, you know — quite young. He might have had an English bishopric if he had waited."

"And Mrs. Chisely?" asked Joyce, interrogatively.

The Rector raised a deprecative hand.

"That's where the whole trouble came in, apparently. It weighed on his mind — a very proud man. He took the first chance that offered."

"Pardon my questioning you," said Joyce, "but I am quite in the dark as to what you are referring to. The last letter, two years back, that I received from Mrs. Chisely was dated from here. She was happily married and all that. I am an old friend of hers. What has happened?"

"I can only repeat the gossip, Mr. Chisely. It seems that just about then some misfortune arose — a first husband of Mrs. Chisely's, supposed dead, turned up, and so there was a separation."

"And where is Mrs. Chisely now?"

"That's more than I can say. A lady — a great friend of mine — also I believe a connexion of your own —"

"Mrs. Winstanley?"

"The same. I see you know her. She may be able to inform you. I believe she has said authoritatively that the late Mrs. Chisely went back to her former husband."

"That I can't believe," said Joyce, indignantly.

"I can only give you what I hear," said the Rector, placidly. "I know Bishop Chisely went to Paris, where they were supposed to be, before starting for New Zealand. But Mrs. Winstanley will tell you."

"I think I know enough," said Joyce, hurriedly, and rising from his chair. "I am greatly indebted to you for your kindness, Mr. Abdy."

"Can I offer you some lunch? It will be on the table in a moment."

Joyce declined, pleaded a train. He would have liked to sit with this kind gossipy old man, but he could not accept such hospitality under false pretences. Perhaps it was well that he acted thus, for later in the afternoon the Rector described his visitor to Mrs. Winstanley. She listened for some time, and at last broke out:—

"Why, my dear Mr. Abdy, it could have been no one else than the convict cousin! He must have come to get money out of Everard."

"Dear me," said Mr. Abdy, arresting his hand in a downward stroke of his beard. "Who would have thought it? He seemed such a gentlemanly fellow. And I asked him to lunch!"

"I 'll write and put the dear Bisnop on his guard," said Mr. Winstanley, virtuously.

Meanwhile, Joyce went away full of wonder and pity. It was an amazing story. Poor Yvonne! He could not believe that she had returned to the scamp of a first husband. The thought was repulsive. At any rate communication between Everard and Yvonne seemed to have been cut off. He was not very sorry for Everard.

"A little trouble will do him good," he muttered to himself. And he found a certain grim amusement in the contemplation of the chastened Bishop, his cousin. But he felt a great concern for poor fragile little Yvonne cast adrift again upon the world. "I will find out what has become of her, at any rate," he said, digging his stick into the road.

The natural course was to write to Miss Geraldine Vicary, whose address he fortunately remembered. If she had lost count of Yvonne, he would set to work to find her some other way. He felt as eager now to recover Yvonne's friendship as he had been apathetic before. To lose no time, while waiting for the early return excursion train, he went into a post-office and wrote and despatched his letter.

The following morning he resumed his newly schemed out life of literary work. Three days passed and no reply came from Miss Vicary. On the fourth morning he received a black-edged envelope bearing the Swansea post-mark. He opened it and read: —

DEAR SIR, — Your letter to Miss Geraldine Vicary was, according to instructions, forwarded to me. I regret to inform you that my poor sister died three weeks ago, of diphtheria. She caught the disease whilst nursing the lady concerning whom, I believe, you inquire. Madame Latour had been living with her for the past two years. Shortly after my poor sister's death, Madame Latour was removed to St. Mary's Hospital, where, as far as I know, she still lies very ill.

Trusting this sad information may be of service to you,

I am yours faithfully,

HENRIETTA DASENT.

Joyce hurried through his dressing, bolted his breakfast, and rushed out into the street, with one idea in his head. Yvonne alone and uncared for, dying in a London hospital — it was incredible. The apparent heartlessness of the woman who wrote, her calm disclaimer of all interest in her dead sister's dying friend,

made his blood boil. A London hospital — an open common ward, with medical students chattering round — it was a cruel place for the sweet delicate woman he remembered as Yvonne. Where were all her friends?

In the dismay, excitement, and indignation of the moment, he forgot his poverty, and jumped into the first hansom-cab he saw.

"St. Mary's Hospital, quick!"

And the cabman, thinking it a matter of life and death, went at a breakneck pace.

CHAPTER XVI

LA CIGALE

SEEING Yvonne at that time of the morning was out of the question. But he penetrated to the landing outside the ward and had a few words with the sister in charge. She was a fresh, pleasant-faced woman, who, having fallen in love with Yvonne, felt kindly disposed toward her friends.

Madame Latour was slowly recovering. One of the most lingering of the sequelæ of diphtheria, diphtheritic paralysis, had set in. It was her larynx and left arm that were affected. At present she was suffering from general weakness. It would be some time yet before she could be moved.

"Do you think I could see her?" asked Joyce — "that is to say, if she would care about it."

"Certainly," replied the sister. "It would probably do her good. To-day is a visiting day — after two o'clock."

"I wonder whether she would like it," said Joyce, questioningly.

"I will take her a message," said the sister.

He scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper and handed it to her. She retired and presently returned, smiling.

"She will be delighted. I have not seen her look like that since she has been here. 'Tell him it will be a joy to see him.' Those were her words."

Joyce thanked her warmly, raised his hat, and departed. It was a fine crisp morning. The message seemed to bring a breath of something sweet into the air. He walked along almost buoyantly in spite of the sad plight of Yvonne. The appalling weight of loneliness was lifted from his shoulders. The sight of him would be a joy to one living creature. It was a new conception, and it winged his feet.

On the stroke of two the great doors of the ward opened, and he entered with a group of visitors, chiefly women of the poorer classes, some carrying babies. It was bewildering at first — the long double row of beds, each with its pale, wistful woman's face. Some of the patients were sitting up, with shawls or wraps

around them; the greater number lay back on their pillows, turning eyes of languid interest towards the visitors. Two beds curtained round broke the uniformity of the two white lines of bedsteads. At the end of the ward, a great open fireplace, with glowing blocks of coal, struck a note of cheerfulness in the grey November light, that streamed through the series of high windows. Joyce felt a man's shyness in walking among these strange sick women, and looked helplessly down the ward from the doorway, to try to discover Yvonne. The sister came to his help from a neighbouring bedside.

"At the very end. The last bed on the left."

Joyce walked down the druggetted aisle, and as soon as he saw her and knew himself to be recognised, he quickened his pace.

There she was, half sitting in the bed, propped up by pillows, her wavy dark hair like a nimbus around her pale face. In honour of the visit she had done up her hair, with infinite difficulty, poor child, and put on a pretty white dressing-jacket tied with knots of crimson ribbon. His heart was smitten with pity. She was so changed, so wasted. Her

delicate features were pinched, her childlike lips blanched. Only the old Yvonne's eyes remained — the great, pathetic, winning dark eyes. They gave him glad and grateful welcome.

"Yvonne."

It was all he could find in his head to say as he pressed her little thin hand.

"How good of you to come to see me," she said.

Joyce was unprepared. It was not Yvonne's voice — once as sweet in speech as in singing; but a toneless, distressed sound devoid of quality, like that of a cracked silver bell. He could not conceal the shadow of dismay on his face. She was quick to note it.

"I am afraid I speak like a wicked old raven," she said with a smile; "but you must n't mind."

"I can't tell you how grieved I am to see you like this," he said, sitting down by the bedside. "You must have been very ill. Poor Yvonne."

"Yes. Awfully ill. You would have been quite sorry to see how ill I was. Do you mind moving your chair further down, so that I can look at you? I can't turn my head, you

know. Isn't it silly not to be able to turn one's head?"

"You must make haste and get well," he said, after he had complied with her request.

"I'm afraid I can't," she said, looking at him wistfully. "They all say it's going to be a long, long business. But I want to know how you came here — to England, I mean," she added more brightly, after a pause. "It was such a startling surprise when Sister brought me your note this morning. Why have you left Africa? I've been dying to know all day."

Joyce sketched rapidly the events that had led him back — the death of Noakes, the year of wretched apathy, the purchase of his book by the publishers, the craving for civilisation.

"So I sold out and came home," he concluded. "I have been back a fortnight."

"You must have been very sad at losing your friend," said Yvonne. "Death is an awful, awful thing. Have you ever thought of it? A person is living and feeling, like you and me, to-day — and to-morrow — gone — out of the world — for ever and ever."

Her voice sank to a whisper and she looked at him out of great, awe-stricken eyes.

"I have lost my dear friend too — just lately. Did you know?"

"Yes," he replied gently. "I wrote to her for your address and her sister answered the letter, telling me of her death."

"Was n't it terrible? And she so bright and brave and strong. I never loved anybody as I loved her. It was only after she was buried that I knew — and then I wished I had died instead — I who am no good to any one at all. And I am alive. Is n't it an awful mystery?"

The man's eyes fell for a moment beneath the intense, child-like earnestness of hers. Silence fell upon them. He stretched out his arm and took her hand that rested outside the coverlet. A man is often instinctively driven to express his sympathy by touch, where a woman would find words.

After a while she withdrew her hand gently, as if to break the current of thoughts.

"I was wondering why you looked different," she said. "You have grown a beard."

"Yes," he said, with a sudden laugh — the transition was so abrupt. "I was too slack to shave in South Africa. Don't you like it?"

"Oh, not at all. It spoils you."

"I will cut it off at once."

"Not just to please me?"

"Just to please you. It will be a new sensation."

"To have it off?"

"No — to please you, Yvonne."

Her eyes smiled gratefully at him.

"Tell me when I must go," he said, after a while. "I must n't tire you. And you may have other visitors."

"Don't go yet. No one else will come."

"How do you know?"

"You are the only person who has been to see me since I was brought here," she replied sadly.

Joyce looked at her for a moment incredulously.

"Do you mean to say you have been quite alone here, among strangers, all these weeks?"

"Yes," she said. "But Sister is kind to me, and they allow me all sorts of little indulgences."

"But you should be among loving friends, Yvonne," said Joyce.

"I have so few. And I have told no one that I am here. I couldn't. Besides, whom could I tell?"

Joyce could not understand. It was so

strange for Yvonne to be friendless. Delicacy forbade him to question further.

"I have had a lot of trouble, you know," she said. "It has been nearly all trouble for over two years. I wrote and told you what had happened. Then I went to live with Geraldine Vicary, and began to sing again. But I was always being laid up with my throat and I never knew whether I could fulfil an engagement when I made it — so I did n't get on as I used to. People won't employ you if they fear you may have to throw them over at the last moment, will they? And Geraldine used to keep me in a great deal, for fear I should hurt my voice. But, you see, I had to make some money. So I went out and sang just before this illness, when I ought not, and my throat became inflamed and I caught another cold, and it got worse and worse until diphtheria came on. Then poor Dina caught it and there was no one to nurse me. You could n't expect her sister, who did n't know me, to do much, could you? And then Dina was just giving up her flat, and of course I could n't keep it on — so the doctor thought I had better come here. *J'y suis, j'y reste* It is not a gay little story, is it?"

"It is a heart-rending story altogether," said Joyce, with a concerned puckering of the forehead. "I wish I could do something to brighten you, Yvonne."

"You have done so," she said with a smile, "by coming to see me. How good of you to remember — and, you know, by your not writing, I thought you had quite forgotten."

"Forgive me, Yvonne — a kind of dull brutishness came over me — I could n't."

"And I could n't either, after the one I wrote — about my trouble — at Fulminster. You never answered it, and I thought — It was n't because you despised me, was it?"

"I did n't get the letter, Yvonne," he said, unable to disregard this second reference as he had done the first. "It must have been the one I heard was lost. I will explain afterwards. I thought you were happy at Fulminster — so why should I inflict my eternal grumblings on you?"

"Then don't you know what has happened?" asked Yvonne, with wider eyes and a little quiver of the lip.

"I learned it a few days ago. I went to Fulminster to find you, as my letters were returned to me through the Post Office. I

was determined to discover you, but I never dreamed of finding you here. I came as soon I got the news this morning."

"I have one friend left," said Yvonne.

"And you shall always have him, if you will," said Joyce. "You are the only one he has."

"Poor fellow," said Yvonne.

Though the sweet voice was broken and hard, there was the same tender pity in the words as when she had uttered them four years back, on their first re-meeting.

"We are two lonesome bodies, are n't we?" she added.

"We 'll do our best to comfort each other," said Joyce.

The visiting hour was nearly at an end, and the ward was growing silent again. The sister came down the aisle and stood by Yvonne's bed and smoothed her pillows.

"You have had quite enough talking for one day," she said pleasantly. "It has given you quite a colour — but we must n't overdo it."

Joyce rose to take his leave.

"I may come again, the next time?" he asked.

"Would you?" said Yvonne, with an eager look.

"I would come to-morrow — every day, if they would let me," he said with conviction.

He shook hands with her and walked away. At the end of the ward he turned, looked back and saw the mass of black against the white pillow and the specks of crimson that showed Yvonne. He hated leaving her among strangers and the rough comforts of an open ward in a hospital. An odd feeling of personal responsibility was mingled with his resentment against the freaks of fortune — an irrational sense of mean-spiritedness in letting her lie there.

He went back to his work, cheered and strengthened within; but his outlook on life was darkened by one more shadow of the inexorable cruelty of fate. That he should have suffered — well and good. It was a penalty he was paying. But Yvonne, the sweetest, innocentest soul alive — why should her head be brought low? And thus the pages that he wrote grew darker by the shadow.

A fortnight passed, during which he saw her as often as the visiting hours allowed. He brought her whatever little trifles he could afford, and she accepted them with the eager gratification of a child. There was a second-

hand bookshop he had come across during his late wanderings, in Upper Street, Islington, which had a speciality in cheap, tattered French novels. Thither he tramped one day in order to gratify a desire she had expressed, and spent an hour turning over the stock. It seemed hard not to be able to go into a West End shop and order the newest Paris fiction; but a poor devil must do as best he can and be cheerful. Yvonne's delight repaid him for wounded pride. She dipped into them all, while he was there, turning to the last page to see how they ended. And then the rakish air their soiled yellow covers gave to the bed, as they sprawled upon it, amused them both.

They talked of many things. Yvonne interested herself in the patients and gossiped about their progress and their eccentricities. Often her artless candour and innate love of laughter gave him details unfit perhaps for ears masculine. Then she would catch herself up, while a faint tinge of colour came into her cheek, and with still smiling eyes, say:

"I always forget that you're a man. You ought to remind me."

Joyce, for his part, strove to amuse her with whatever gleams of brightness he could find in

his colonial adventures. Noakes grew to be the hero of an Arthurian cycle. As for the fat Boer woman, he was surprised at the amount of grim humour he extracted from her doings.

"I hope you are going to put it in a book," Yvonne would say, with her little air of wisdom. "You must n't waste it all upon me."

And Joyce, by thus disintegrating incidents from his confused mass of impressions, found the talks of material benefit as well as a delight. For a delight they were; the more so, because Yvonne's gladness at his visits was so obviously genuine and spontaneous. She told him that she counted the hours between them. And Yvonne scarcely exaggerated. His visits were bright spots in a sorrowful, fear-haunted time. When he came, she summoned up all her strength and courage so as to make the hour pass pleasantly. Men do not like crying, complaining women, thought poor Yvonne. Unless she was bright for him, he might grow tired of coming, and then she would be lonelier than before. So Yvonne told him little of the anxieties that lay like a dead weight upon her poor little soul and kept her awake at nights, amid the moans of the sleeping women,

that sounded faint and ghostly in the dim ward.

Her patient acceptance of her lot won Joyce's admiration. But of her real position he had no idea. The gentleman in him that had survived his shame and degradation forbade him to pry into her private affairs. Besides, he took it for granted that when she recovered, she would live by herself again, in the old way, and that her drawing-room would be a haven of rest to him for indefinite years. The question of nursing alone, he thought, and her incomprehensible friendlessness, had brought her to the hospital. He longed for her to leave it.

One day, however, he found her lying down in bed, her hair in dark loose masses over the pillow, her face turned away towards the sister who was sitting by her side. The latter rose on seeing him, and hurried forward to meet him in the aisle.

"Be as kind as you can to her," she said; "she is in great trouble to-day, poor little thing."

"What is the matter?" asked Joyce, anxiously.

"Let her speak for herself. I was to send you away when you came. She was not fit to

see you, she said. But I am sure it will comfort her to talk to a friend."

The sister moved away, and Joyce approached Yvonne's bedside with quick steps. Something serious must have happened.

Yvonne raised a wan, desolate face and eyes heavy with crying, and put out her hand timidly from beneath the bedclothes. He retained it, as he sat down upon the chair just vacated by the sister. The few little cakes he had brought her he placed on the stand near by. She looked too woe-begone for cakes.

"I have come in spite of your message," he said. "Why did you want to send me away?"

"I am too miserable," murmured Yvonne, in her broken voice.

"What has happened to make you miserable?" he asked very softly. "Tell me, if it is anything I can hear."

"It's my voice that has gone," cried Yvonne in a sob. "They told me this morning — the doctor brought a throat specialist — I shall never be able to sing again — never."

Before this sudden calamity the man was powerless for comfort.

"My poor little woman!" he said.

"It is worse than losing a limb," moaned Yvonne. "I have been dreading it — hoping against hope all along. I wished I had died instead of Dina. I wish I could die now."

The tears came again. She drew away her hand and dabbed her eyes with a miserable little wet rag of a handkerchief.

"Don't," said Joyce, helplessly. "If you give way you will make yourself worse. They may be mistaken. Perhaps it will come again after a year or two."

He strove to cheer her, brought forward all the arguments he could think of, all the tender phrases his unaccustomed mind could suggest. At last the tears ceased for a time.

"But it is my means of livelihood gone," she said. "When I leave here I shall starve."

"Not while I live," said Joyce, impulsively. Then he reflected. Surely she could not be entirely without means. He coloured slightly at his remark, as at an impertinence.

"I shall never get any money any more as long as I live," said Yvonne. "I can only go from this hospital into the workhouse. And I won't go there. I will pray to die rather."

"But," began Joyce, in an embarrassed way,

"I don't understand. Forgive me for touching upon it — but has not Everard — ?"

"No, oh, no! I refused. I could n't take his money, if I was not his wife."

"That 's absurd," said Joyce. But his opinion did not alter the facts. He remained for a moment in thought. "Don't lose heart," he said at length. "Things are never as bad as they seem. I've had awfully bad times and yet I have pulled through, somehow. You can live quietly for a little on what you have, and then —"

"But I have n't a penny, Stephen," she cried piteously. "Not a penny in the world. I earned scarcely anything the last year. If it had n't been for Dina, I don't know what I should have done. I don't own anything but a few sticks of furniture and some clothes —"

"Where are they?"

"The porter's wife at the mansions is keeping them for me, I believe. They may be sold. I was too ill to trouble."

"I 'll see about them for you," said Joyce.

His heart was moved with great pity for the sweet, helpless little soul. It seemed hard to realise that, when they had met four years ago, he had looked upon her as a Lady Boun-

tiful, who had only to stretch out her kind arm to save him from starvation. Oh, the whirligig of time! And yet the memory of her help was very precious to him.

"You must let me act for you, Yvonne, will you?"

"You have your own troubles, poor fellow," said Yvonne.

"Yours will drive mine away, so they will be a blessing in disguise. I wonder if you could trust me?"

"I have always done so — and I do. Aren't you the only friend I have?"

"That is what beats me entirely," he said. "What are all your friends doing?"

"They have all disappeared gradually," said Yvonne. "My poor marriage cut me adrift from my old circle. And at Fulminster — I didn't make many real friends."

"There was a girl you wrote to me about once or twice."

"Sophia Wilmington? She's married and gone out to India. I should have written to her if she had been in England, for she was fond of me."

"I should have thought that the whole world was fond of you, Yvonne."

"I don't know," she said wistfully. "It seems that I have always been a kind of waif. I never had any solid kinds of friends, families and so forth — except your dear mother. I once knew a lot of professionals — but I saw men mostly — I could never tell why — and they don't bother about you much when they've lost sight of you, do they? I thought Vandeleur might have wondered what had become of me."

"Dear, dear!" said Joyce, reflectively. "I remember Vandeleur from the long ago."

"Yes, he's an old friend. But, you see, it was through Dina. He behaved badly to her and married Elsie Carnegie — and so they were cuts. I only saw him once all last year. I heard she was awfully jealous. Isn't it silly of a woman? I think, if he knew I was here he'd come. But what would be the use?"

"Not much, except to say a friendly word to you. But still — while you were living with Miss Vicary, you must have made some acquaintances. It seems so extraordinary."

"We lived so very much alone," explained Yvonne. "Poor Dina didn't know many people — no one liked her. With one exception — and he died long ago — I think I am

the only one in the world who ever loved Dina. No — I am just a waif — that's what I am."

In her simple way she had accounted to him accurately for her life since her rupture with Everard. At first she had been too sore at heart to go much into the world. Then Geraldine, whose influence with her was paramount, continually discouraged her from renewing old acquaintanceships. Her friends had literally melted away. Had she so chosen, she might have interested in her misfortunes a score of professional well-wishers. But Yvonne was proud in many unexpected ways, and would have died rather than have the shame of sending the hat round for relief. As for communicating with Fulminster, it was not to be thought of.

"I don't care," she added, after a pause; "I have found you again."

"Then dry your poor eyes," he said comfortingly; "and don't think any more of the worries. Don't you remember how happy you made me once, when I was in desperate straits — when all the world cast me off but you? You are still the only being who knows me and cares whether I live or die. You are

neither going to starve, Yvonne, nor die in a workhouse. As long as I have a penny you shall have half of it. Don't think of anything more than the immediate future, little woman. We will manage that all right. Be comforted."

He spoke earnestly, leaning forward with his arm on the bed. The precariousness of his own fortunes scarcely occurred to him. He was deeply moved. At that moment he would have cut off his right hand for her.

Yvonne thanked him with her eyes, which grew very soft and grateful. His man's strength brought her comfort. She trusted him implicitly, as she had all her life trusted those who were kind to her. She closed her eyes for a moment with a little sigh of relief. She was so content to yield to the generous hand that was taking the terrible burden from her shoulders, felt as if she could go to sleep like a tired child. When she opened her eyes they were almost smiling.

"I 'll try to be happy again, so as to thank you, Stephen," she said.

"Well, here is something for you — what you like — eat one to show me you are comforted."

He put the paper bag into her hand, and, tilting back his chair, watched her pleased expression as she peeped into the mouth and drew out one of the cakes.

"Oh, how sweet of you!" she said, with a flash of her old sunlight.

Suddenly he rose, and stood, hands in pockets, by the window, frowning absently at the gathering mist of evening outside. A conviction was forcing itself on his mind — a cold douche for his quixotic impulses. Obvious right and common-sense prevailed.

"Yvonne," he said turning round. "You had no quarrel with Everard, had you, at parting?"

"Oh, no," she replied, looking up round-eyed from her paper-bag. "He was very kind to me."

"Have you written to him about this?"

"No. We arranged we should not correspond. He sent me word when he was going out to New Zealand. But I could n't let him know — I should be ashamed. Oh, no, Stephen, I could n't write to him and say, 'I am a beggar now, please give me charity.' Why should he support me?"

"I hate questioning you," said Joyce in

some embarrassment, "but — is it repugnant to you to — to think of Everard?"

"Why, of course not, Stephen. It was a time of awful pain and misery — but if he came to take me back as his wife, I would go to him. If he ever can, I have promised that I will."

With all his knowledge of her, Joyce was taken aback by her simple candour.

"If that is so, why on earth shrink from reconsidering, now, his former offer?" he asked, exceedingly puzzled at her point of view.

"You tell me what I ought to do, and I will do it," said Yvonne.

"You must write to Everard."

"Very well."

"Then you need not have any fears at all for the future. It will be all so simple."

"How can I thank you?" said Yvonne. "Oh, if I could only sing for you! But nothing will ever give me back my voice — I am a useless little creature. And you have been so good to me to-day. I shall never forget it all my life."

But Joyce's heart was at ebb-tide again. He rose soon, and took his hat and stick.

"There is no reason to thank me, Yvonne,"

he said, with bitterness. "What I have done for you has cost me nothing — the cheapest of all services; I have only given you advice."

Yvonne looked at him wistfully.

"If you talk like that, you will make me cry again."

"Forgive me," said Joyce. "I am a beast."

CHAPTER XVII

YVONNE PROPOSES

It was night. Yvonne lay wide awake. A suffused sound of breathing filled the air. Now and then a moan or a smothered cry of pain broke sharply upon the stillness. The woman in the adjacent bed began to murmur broken words in her sleep: "For the children's sake, Joe — my poor little children — I wish we was all dead." Some poor tragedy re-enacting itself in slumber. Yvonne listened pityingly. The woman had seemed as broken down that day with misery as she herself. Then silence again, and Yvonne fell back upon her own tragedy, which seemed to be working itself out in the staring wakeful hours.

She had not written to Everard. Pen, ink, and paper had been brought. The sister had propped her up with pillows in a posture especially comfortable for writing. But her strength had failed her. To ask him for money was more than her pride could do.

Instead, she had written a long outpouring to Joyce, which lay unposted under her pillow.

This pride was a seam of flint in her soft nature. She would have returned to Everard as his wife, willingly, gratefully, glad to lay her tired head on his shoulder, and feel his strong protection around her once more. But from any one rather than him would she accept charity. Illogical, irrational, absurd — but a reality none the less in her heart.

Perhaps it was a protest of wounded sex. If Everard had treated her differently on that disastrous day, the quivering feminine might have gone unscathed. But in his anger, pain, and disillusion he had driven her wrongs towards him into her flesh, almost like infidelities. She was too generous to feel resentful. An offer of remarriage would be a natural acknowledgment of error. To accept his support, apart from him, stung her to the soul with a sense of being cast off as faithless wife or dishonest mistress, to whom, however, he was forgivingly and charitably disposed. And yet what was she to do? Joyce would save her from immediate want, but she could not look to him for anything but temporary assistance. More was preposterous.

At last she gave up thinking. Joyce, with his cleverness, would see some way out of her difficulties. Somewhat comforted, she fell asleep. The next day was long and intensely dismal. The more clearly she saw that Joyce's counsel was the only course to follow, the more hateful it seemed to her to write the letter. She put it off from hour to hour. And then the terrible blow that had befallen her weighed upon her mind. She strove to realise herself moving about the world without a voice. It was as hard to grasp as the conception of herself as a bodiless shade on the banks of Acheron. When the elusiveness ceased, and the reality loomed upon her in all its grimness, she wept bitterly. The consequence was that, in her still weak state, she broke down with the mental worry, and, when Joyce next came, he found her in a far worse state than before. She could scarcely move or speak. Letter-writing was out of the question. By the merest chance he learned, during the five minutes the sister allowed him to have with her, that she had not yet written to Everard.

"But the mail goes to-morrow," he said. "I have been making enquiries. If we don't write now, we shall lose a month. Shall I

write to Everard, seeing that your poor little self is incapable?"

She murmured assent, and sighed as if in grateful relief. Joyce comforted her as best he could and left her reluctantly. When he got home, he wrote the letter, a bald statement of facts to which he appended his signature and the address of his lodgings. He sealed it, directed it, in his nervous, characteristic handwriting and hurried out to post it at once. It was a most disagreeable duty over, for to communicate with his cousin went sorely against the grain. A pleasanter duty awaited him, as soon as he could settle down to his evening's work, the correction of the first batch of proofs from the publishers.

In the course of time, Yvonne recovered her spirits and was on the mend again. Signs of returning strength showed themselves in her left arm, which, together with the throat on that side, had been affected by the disease. Her speaking voice also began to regain some of its old sweetness, though the surgeons confirmed their statement that the singing voice was irrevocably gone.

"Do say they are wrong," said Yvonne casting a pleading look at Joyce.

"Perhaps they are," said he; "let us hope."

"Then I may not need Everard's money, after all."

"You will for a couple of years, at least," he said kindly. "But you may be able to pay it back afterwards."

This consoled her, and she began to build great schemes. On another occasion she said to him irrelevantly :—

"Do you think I ought to write to Everard?" She had raised him by this time to the position of father confessor. A certain feminine weakness in Joyce's nature, developing gradually, through his intercourse with her, into a finer sensitiveness, made it easy for her to give him her confidence, to speak with him much as she used to speak with Geraldine. And yet, he being a man, his utterances on such questions, had for her all their masculine weight.

"It is a matter entirely of your own inclination," he replied oracularly.

"But I don't know what my inclination is," said Yvonne. "Everard once told me that it was a much harder thing to know what one's duty was than to do it when you know what it is."

"He was plagiarising from George Eliot,"

said Joyce, not ill-pleased at a malicious hit at the Bishop. And then, teasingly to Yvonne: "And I'm sure they both put it a little more grammatically."

"I won't talk grammar," cried Yvonne. "I always hated it. It is silly stuff. You understood perfectly what I meant, didn't you?"

"Perfectly," said Joyce.

"Then what's the good of grammar?" cried Yvonne, triumphantly. "But you make me forget what I was going to say. It was something quite clever. Oh yes! Substitute 'inclination' for 'duty,' and you have my difficulty. Now do tell me what I am to do."

"Well, wait until you hear from Everard, and then write him a nice long letter," said Joyce.

"That's just what I wanted to do," said she; "you are so good to me."

She was to leave the hospital in January. The time was rapidly approaching. Much of their time together was spent in the discussion of plans for the immediate future. Yvonne wanted to sell her furniture, which Joyce had inspected and found in safe hands. He opposed the idea. What was the use, when she would want it again, as soon as she was com-

fortably situated? In three months she would be in receipt of funds. Everard might cable her back a remittance long before. In the meantime, he could advance her a lump sum out of his capital.

"Then you can take unfurnished rooms and put in your own things at once. It will be much cheaper."

"But suppose I don't pay you back," said Yvonne. "How can you make me?"

"I can suggest nothing but a bill of sale on the furniture," he replied laughingly.

"What is that?"

"Well, you sign a paper saying that if the debt is not paid in three months, at the end of that time I can put in the brokers and sell your furniture and take all the money."

"Oh, that would be lovely!" cried Yvonne. "Do let me do it. I should feel so business-like. Draw it up now and I'll sign it."

"It will have to be registered," said Joyce.

"Well, register it then. What's to prevent you?"

"I was only jesting," said Joyce.

"But I'm quite serious. Don't you see how serious I am? Come — to please me."

The idea caught her childish fancy, and she

spoke quite in her old, gay mood. She was sitting up now, partially dressed, and, being able to move her limbs more freely, reached for writing materials that lay on the little table by her bed.

"There, draw it up at once, as fearfully legally as you can, with all kinds of 'aforesaids' in it."

Joyce fell into her humour, and drew up the document in due form, read it over to her solemnly, and called one of the nurses to witness the signatures. Then he wrote out a cheque for the amount of the loan, which she locked up in her despatch-box. He went away with the bill of sale in his pocket. On his next visit he informed her that it had been registered and that he would be a merciless creditor. The frivolity of the proceedings cheered him.

Meanwhile, the real problem of Yvonne's arrangements presented itself. The idea of going at once into unfurnished rooms was abandoned. She was far too weak and helpless as yet for the worries of housekeeping. He suggested a boarding-house. But Yvonne shrank from the prospect of living among strangers.

"Besides, you could n't come and see me as

often as I should like," she added, with a little air of worldly wisdom. "You haven't an idea what scandal is talked in those places." So Joyce quickly acquiesced in her taboo of boarding-houses, and found the choice of domicile narrowed down to furnished apartments.

Yvonne was beginning to be a vital interest in his life. On the days that the hospital was not open to him, he sent her little notes of his doings and of such things as might amuse her. In her helpless dependence she grew to be what Noakes had been to him in his latter days — with the sweet and subtle difference made by her sex. He had moods almost of happiness. Yet, like Noakes, Yvonne had not the power of freeing him from himself, from the awful memories, from the taint that clung to him. His crime and its punishment was his hair-shirt, for ever next the sensitive skin, never for the shortest intervals forgotten. Small incidents were never wanting to bring back the old burning anguish. Already in the streets he had passed, unrecognised, two old prison-associates. The sight of them was hateful. Once, in the Strand, he came face to face with a man, his chief intimate in that fashionable demi-reputable world which had drawn

him to his precipice. The man cut him dead. On another occasion he met a troop of his cousins from Holland Park on the terrace of the British Museum. He noticed a girl recognize him and turn round another way, with a start, as he sprang hurriedly by through the folding doors. After such encounters, he cowered under the sense of everlasting disgrace. The old longing that always had lain dormant within him revived with intense poignancy; the longing to redeem his self-respect by some wild heroic deed of atonement. Sometimes he thought of realising all his capital, including the publisher's eighty pounds and giving it to Yvonne. But soon she would be beyond the need of his help and his sacrifice would be merely silly. Common-sense leads us generally to the most hopeless commonplace. Nor did patient bearing of his lot appeal to his sensitive fancy as an expiation. The self-respect that would enable him to face the world's back with cheerful calm could only be purchased by some great self-sacrifice. But what chances for such were offered in his humdrum, poverty-stricken life?

The days passed uneventfully. He wrote from morning to night, either in the Museum or

in his attic, with a fierce determination to earn a livelihood that braced his powers. His attempts at occasional journalism were fairly encouraging. The new novel grew daily in gloomy bulk. Often, on Yvonne-less days, he strolled up to the secondhand bookshop, where he had bought the French novels, and chatted with the proprietor, with whom he had struck up an acquaintance. He was a snuffy, rheumy-eyed old man, Ebenezer Runcle by name, with chronic bronchitis and a deep disdain for the remnant of the universe outside his bookshop. But for the lumbering, chaotic, higgledy-piggledy world of volumes within its book-lined walls, he had a passionate veneration. Joyce found him a mine of extraordinary and useless information. To sit on a pile of books and listen to unceasing gossip about Gregory Nazianzene, Sozomen, Evagrius, Photius — about Aristotle, Averrhoes, Duns Scotus, and the Schoolmen — about Hakluyt and Purchas — about forgotten historians, churchmen, poets, dramatists, of all countries in Europe; to turn over musty old editions of famous printers, the Aldi, Junta, Elzevirs, Stephani, Allobrandi, Jehans, which the old man shuffled off to procure from dim recesses of the

shelves, was a new intellectual delight. It was a renewal of the keen book-interest of his Oxford days, and a mental stimulus such as he had not received for many weary years. Gradually it appeared that Mr. Runcle looked forward to his visits; and Joyce, who had been shy at first of trespassing upon his time, gladly took advantage of his welcome. Sometimes he helped the old man in the constant work of rearranging and cataloguing the stock. One afternoon, he found him wheezing so painfully with his complaint, that he persuaded him to sit in the little back parlour, while he himself took charge of the establishment and served customers till closing time. After that he dropped into the habit of playing salesman. The old man seemed a lonely, pathetic figure. Joyce's heart instinctively warmed toward him.

One afternoon, toward the middle of January, he visited Yvonne for the last time in the hospital. She received him, as on the last two or three occasions, in the sister's little sitting-room just outside the ward. For the first time, however, she was completely dressed, and only now did Joyce realise how thin and fragile she had become. She looked absurdly small in the great cane armchair before the fire

"So I am to call for you on Thursday at twelve and carry you off to your new abode," he said.

"Have you settled yet?" asked Yvonne.

"No, not yet. If I can get the place in Elm Park, I shall give up the other. I shall hear to-morrow."

Yvonne looked wistfully into the fire, and sighed.

"I shall feel awfully lonesome there, by myself. I am beginning to dread it. You won't think me silly, will you? I used not to mind living alone. But then it was different. You 'll come and see me very, very often. Bring your writing, and I 'll be as quiet as a mouse and won't disturb you. You don't know how frightened and nervous I am. I suppose it 's because I have been so ill."

"You poor little thing," said Joyce, looking down upon her, as he stood on the hearthrug, "I wish I knew some motherly soul to take care of you — or that I could take care of you myself," he added, with a smile.

"Oh, I wish you could," cried Yvonne, piteously, with an appealing glance. "Oh, Stephen — could n't you? I would n't give you much trouble."

"Do you mean, Yvonne, that you would like me to get lodgings in the same house as you?" asked Joyce, with a sudden flash in his eyes.

"Yes," said Yvonne. "Just at first. Until I feel stronger. I have been longing to ask you, but I did n't dare. Don't think me selfish and horrid."

The notion dawned upon him like an inspiration. Why had he not thought of it before? Why should he not find a garret above her rooms whence he could look protectingly down upon her, in brotherly affection, instead of leaving her ill and alone to the dubious mercy of landladies and lodging-house servants? He was quite bewildered by the charm of her proposal.

"But, Yvonne, do you know what undreamed-of happiness you are offering me?" he said.

"Then you would like it?" she cried gladly.

"Why, my dear child!" said Joyce; and he walked about the room to express his feelings.

"I have thought it all out," said Yvonne, sagely. "We can go to much cheaper rooms than you intended me to have, so that you can

pay the same for your own lodgings as you pay now. I would n't lead you into extravagances for anything in the world."

"If it comes to that," said Joyce, "the second floor is vacant where I lodge now."

"But that is delightful!" cried Yvonne. "The fates have arranged it on purpose for us."

They talked for a while over the new plan. Joyce's acquiescence, relieving her of much nervous dread of loneliness, raised her spirits wonderfully.

"You won't tyrannise over me too much, will you? If I am going out with tan shoes, you won't send me indoors to put on black ones? Promise me."

He laughed. The idea of such an attitude towards her seemed to belong more to comic opera than to real life. And yet he felt his authority. She regarded him with the implicit trust of a stray child.

The sister came in and stayed whilst afternoon tea was in progress. She had built up a lone woman's romance for these two, and had taken them both into her friendship. Hence the use of the sitting-room, the tea and her wise counsels to Joyce as to the proper care of Yvonne. When she left them alone again, a

silence fell upon them, and with it the gloomy cloud upon Joyce, that no sunshine could dispel for long. He looked broodingly into the fire, the lines deepening on his face, the old pain in his eyes.

Was it a right thing that he was about to do — to associate his tarnished name with hers? It was all very well to dream of the sweetness and light that daily companionship with her would bring into his life — but was he fit, socially, morally, spiritually, to live with her? It was taking advantage of her innocence. His sensitiveness shrank, as if from the suggestion of a baser disloyalty to her trustingness.

Yvonne, leaning back in her long chair, kept her dark eyes fixed upon him. At first she wondered at his sudden gloom, and fancied distressedly that it proceeded from her proposal. But suddenly an illumination, such as she had never in her life experienced, lit up her mind, and caused her a strange little thrill. She called his name softly. He started, turned, rose at her sign and bent low over her chair.

"I want to come and live with you more than ever now, Stephen," she said; and as she spoke her voice seemed to have regained its musical softness. "I mean to try and drive

away the sad thoughts from you. Perhaps, after all, though I can't sing, I may do a little good in the world."

Her tenderness touched him. He wished she was a child that he might kiss her. The temptation to receive this boon the gods were giving him was too strong. He yielded entirely. And from that hour began Yvonne's conscious battle with the powers of darkness in the desolate depths of a man's heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

DRIFTWOOD

They lived together four months, Yvonne in her comfortable rooms, Joyce in his attic overhead. At first she had been helpless, requiring much aid both from Joyce and from the landlady, over whom she had cast her accustomed charm; but with the early spring weather she recovered full use of her limbs, and strength enough to fight her small battles for herself. To Joyce it had been a time of consolation in many black moods. He dreaded the arrival of the New Zealand mail, which he calculated would bring Yvonne her freedom. It was almost a relief when he assured himself by enquiries that no news had come from the Bishop. He had another month of Yvonne's companionship to look forward to. When that passed, however, and the second mail from New Zealand proved as fruitless as the first, he was forced to look at matters from a practical point

of view. He had already far exceeded the original advance he had made to Yvonne. Under the assurance that he would be reimbursed, he had not scrupled to spend money freely on little luxuries and comforts. At the present rate of living, therefore, another two months would see him at the end of his resources, which included money that he had received in advance for the copyright of his book. His current income from occasional journalism was ridiculously small. The new novel was only half-way towards completion. Poverty stared him in the face.

As a last resource he went to Everard's bankers, but only to learn that his cousin had withdrawn his account. He found Yvonne anxiously awaiting the result of this errand. As he entered, she rose impulsively, scattering scissors and spool of cotton from her lap. She read his failure in his face.

"What is to be done?" she asked, when he had finished his report.

"I don't know," replied Joyce, truthfully.

He looked at her, puzzled and distressed.

"You must pay yourself out of the furniture and let me go," said Yvonne.

"Where would you go to?"

"I don't know," said Yvonne in her turn.

At the picture of helpless dismay Joyce broke into a laugh.

"Oh, how *can* you laugh, when I owe you all this money?" she said, with a choke in her voice.

"Because I am glad, Yvonne, that fate seems to compel me to go on looking after you."

"But how can you go on? How can I burden you any further?"

"Don't talk about burdens," he said gently. "You repay me twice over for what little I have given you."

"But the furniture is not worth all that," said Yvonne.

"What has the furniture to do with it?"

"Why it is yours, is n't it?"

"How, mine?"

"The bill of sale," replied Yvonne seriously.

"Oh, you dear little goose," cried Joyce, "you don't suppose I am going to sell you up!"

"Why not — if you need the money? The furniture is all your own."

"How can it be when I don't claim it?"

Yvonne shook her head. Ordinarily the most easily swayed of women, now and then

she was inconvincible. She had got it into her head that the furniture had lapsed by sheer law of England into his possession, and no argument could move her. He explained that he could renew the bill. She dismissed the explanation with a little foreign gesture.

"I own nothing in the world but what I stand up in," she persisted.

"Then you're worse off than ever," said Joyce.

"I am," she said despondently. "Is n't it strange to want money! I never knew what it was before."

There was an odd pathos in her face that touched him.

"Cheer up, little woman. Nothing is ever so bad as it looks."

Comforting words were nice, but they did not change the position. Money had to be obtained. Where was it to come from?

"I suppose I must write to Everard, since your letter has miscarried."

"Letters don't miscarry nowadays," said Joyce. "They don't even do so in novels. Still, you had better write. I wish you felt you need n't."

"So do I."

"We shall have to part as soon as he cables a remittance."

"Oh, I wish we could get along as we are," said Yvonne. "I have been so happy here with you."

"Then let us fight it out between us," exclaimed Joyce resolutely. "You 'll soon be able to get some singing lessons, and I 'll find a situation as railway porter, or something, and we 'll rub along somehow till better times."

"Oh, you don't know how much gladder I should be!" cried Yvonne with a sparkle in her eyes. "If I only could earn something — not be a drag upon you! Oh, I would sooner lead the life of a poor, poor woman, in the humblest way, than take Everard's money — you know that."

"We can't go on living here," said Joyce, gently.

"Of course not. We will go to much cheaper rooms and live like working-folks. I can do lots of things, lay fires, make pastry —"

"Dumplings will be as far as we can get," said Joyce.

"Well, then, they 'll be beautiful dumplings," said Yvonne.

"And I dare say we can find a way to settle the furniture question," said Joyce. "I shall begin to look about for a cheap place at once."

So the trouble fell from Yvonne for a time. Now that she had decided to make no further appeal to Everard, but to endeavour once more to earn her livelihood, she felt lighter-hearted. Her attachment to Stephen had grown so strong that she had contemplated the loss of his daily protection with dismay. The solitary life frightened her. The vicissitudes through which she had passed, the loss of her voice especially, had taken away her nerve. At first, she had been so weak from her long illness and her helpless arm, that she found Stephen's presence an unspeakable comfort, and did not speculate upon any anomaly in her position. By the time she regained health, their life under the same roof appeared in the natural order of every-day things. And it was very pleasant. Besides, with the daily intercourse, came a deeper comprehension of his shipwreck. She began to realise that the material dependence on her side was reciprocated by a spiritual dependence on his. It awoke new and delicious stirrings of pride to feel her influence over him, to find herself of use to a man. Once she could sing,

amuse — yield her lips with kind passivity to satisfy strange, unknown needs. She had regarded herself with wistful seriousness, in her relations with men, as a poor little instrument for men to play on. They fingered the stops, extracted what music they could, and then laid the pipe aside while they devoted themselves to the business of the world. But Stephen approached her differently from other men. He did not want her for her voice; he did not throw himself weary into a chair and say, "Chatter and amuse me;" and he did not look at her with eyes yearning for her lips. But his needs, quite other than she had known before, were revealing themselves to her with gradual distinctness. She was learning his humbled pride, his lacerated self-respect, his ingrained sense of degradation, his crying need of sympathy and encouragement and ennobling object in life. The strong man came to her, Yvonne, to be healed and strengthened; and, from some fresh-discovered fountain within her, she was finding remedy for maladies and sustaining draughts for weakness. A new conception of herself was dawning before her, in a great, quiet happiness; and her nature unconsciously expanded.

Thus a twofold instinct urged her to throw in her lot with Joyce.

He passed a very anxious week. It seemed as if his old bitter and fruitless search for work was to be repeated. Neither could he find suitable apartments. "I 'm afraid it will have to come to the workhouse," he said in dejected jest.

"Oh, that will never do!" cried Yvonne. "They would separate us."

She had been more successful. Two or three of the ex-pupils to whom she had written had replied, promising their recommendation. With a shrewdness that won Joyce's admiration she used the address of her former agents, who willingly forwarded her letters. But the sight of the familiar office, whither she had gone to beg this favour, had brought her a bitter pang of regret for the lost voice. She had cried all the way home and then looked anxiously in the glass, afraid lest Joyce should perceive the traces of her tears. She strove valiantly to cheer him in his worries.

At last Joyce went to his friend, the second-hand bookseller in Islington, whom he had seen less frequently since his life with Yvonne, and there, to his delighted surprise, found a solution

for all his difficulties. The old man was growing too infirm to carry on the business single-handed. He wanted an assistant.

"And where am I to get one?" he said querulously. "I don't want a damned fool who does n't know an Elzevir from a Catnach."

"I 'll come like a shot if you 'll have me," said Joyce, eagerly.

"You? Why, you 're a gentleman and a scholar," said the old man.

"So much the better," returned Joyce, laughing. "There will be something mediæval about the arrangement."

The bargain was quickly struck. Furthermore, when Joyce explained his domestic considerations, the old man offered him, at a small rent, three rooms in the house, above the shop. There they were, he said; they were not used, he once took in lodgers, but they pestered his life out; so he had made up his mind not to be worried with them any more. However, Joyce was an exception. He was quite welcome to them; he himself only wanted a bedroom and the little back-parlour on the ground-floor.

These reserved quarters, the vacant three rooms and a kitchen with an adjoining servant's bedroom, made up the internal arrangements

of the old-fashioned, rather dilapidated house. Joyce went up to inspect. At first his heart sank. The rooms were only half-furnished, the paper was mouldy, dirt abounded, the ceilings were low and blackened. However, many of these drawbacks could be remedied. Mr. Runcle promised a thorough cleansing and repapering, whereat Joyce's spirits rose again. Next to the sitting-room was a fair-sized bedroom for Yvonne; upstairs a little room for himself. He enquired about attendance. The old man explained that a woman lived on the premises. She did for him and would doubtless be glad to do for Joyce also, for a small sum per week.

By the end of a few days they were settled in their new abode. The bits of furniture, that had been the subject of such dispute, made the place habitable. Re-papered and whitewashed and hung with curtains and a few pictures out of Yvonne's salvage, it looked almost cosy. But the threadbare carpet and rug, the horsehair sofa, and odd, rickety chairs and the small-paned, cheaply-painted windows gave it an aspect of poverty that nothing could efface.

"It's not a palace," said Joyce ruefully,

looking round him on the day they took definite possession. "You will miss many comforts, Yvonne."

"I 'm not going to miss anything," she replied, "except worry and anxiety. I am going to be perfectly happy here."

"You don't know what a sweet incongruity you are among these surroundings," he said; "you remind one of a dainty piece of lace sewn on to corduroys. Oh, I hope this life won't be too rough for you — we shall have to practise so many miserable little economies — coals, gas, food —"

Yvonne broke into a sunny laugh. "Oh, that 's just like a man! Did you ever hear of a well-regulated woman that did n't love to economise? When I was at Fulminster, you have no idea how I cut down expenses!"

She turned to take off her hat before the discoloured gilt mirror over the mantelpiece, and then threw it quickly on the round centre table and faced him again.

"I shall be quite as happy here as I was in Fulminster. Perhaps happier, in a sense. You know, I always felt so small in that big house. This just suits me."

Thus began the odd life together of these

two waifs, abandoned by the world. The previous four months had been invested with an air of transience. Yvonne's presence beneath the same roof as Joyce had been a temporary arrangement until supplies should come from the Bishop. They had not joined in housekeeping. Whenever Joyce went down to Yvonne, he had done so purely in the character of a visitor. From that state of things to this life in common was a great step. And yet to each it seemed natural. Society being unaware of their existence, they felt no particular need of observing Society's conventions. To the old bookseller, to the servant, to each other, they were brother and sister, and that was enough.

Joyce found his work fairly light. The important part of the business was carried on by orders through the post. Purchases of "rare and curious books" at prices per volume from three pounds upwards are rarely made casually over the counter. Joyce knew this, of course, but he was nevertheless surprised at the extensiveness of Ebenezer Runcle's connection. Every morning there was considerable correspondence to be got through, parcels of books to be made up and despatched, the slips for

the monthly catalogue to be kept up to date. After that, if no new stock was brought in, there was little else to do but wait for customers. The long spells of leisure were invaluable to him for writing. He found his mind worked smoothly in the quiet, musty atmosphere of the books. There they were, in brilliant rows around the walls, on bookcases running longitudinally through the shop, piled in stacks by the doorway, in corners, upon trestles, anywhere. A great rampart of them cut off the draught of the door. In the small enclosed space thus formed was a stove, on one side of which he placed his writing-table, while on the other, in a dilapidated cane armchair, sat the old man, a bent, wheezing figure, deep in his beloved patristic literature.

At intervals during the day he saw Yvonne, who was proud and happy in the superintendence of her humble establishment. Not long after the move, some welcome singing-lessons came, at a house in Russell Square, and enabled her to contribute her mite towards the household expenses. It was a hard problem to make ends meet sometimes, on what Joyce was able to set apart for housekeeping, and at first, through lack of experience in close econ-

omy, she made dreadful blunders. Then she came in tearful penitence to Joyce. On one of these occasions, he had arrived for dinner, and found her gazing piteously upon three meatless bones, standing like ribs of wreck in a beach of potatoes. She had thought enough had been left from yesterday for two more meals. He consoled her as best he could, and tackled the potatoes. But she watched him with so miserable and remorse-stricken a face that at last he broke out laughing. And then, Yvonne, who was quick to see the light side of things, laughed too and forgot her troubles. After a time, no housewife in the neighbourhood kept a shrewder eye upon the butcher.

The evenings they usually spent together, working or talking. Now and then, at Joyce's invitation, the old man would come in, and the trio would talk literature, the old man vaunting the ancients and Joyce defending the moderns, until a veritable Battle of the Books was recontested, while Yvonne sat by, in awed silence, wondering at the vastness of human learning. Often he wrote or discussed the novel with her. In this she took the deepest interest. The intellectual processes involved

were a perpetual mystery to her, and caused her to place Joyce on a pinnacle of genius. But her sympathy and enthusiasm helped him as few other things could. And gradually her influence made itself felt in his writing. His sympathies widened, his aspect upon life softened. Planned to reveal the bitter sordidness of broken lives, and half written in a grey, hopeless atmosphere, imperceptibly the book lost in harshness, grew in tenderness and humanity. And this corresponded to the softening in the nature of the man himself.

Yet now and then incidents occurred that brought back the past in all its gloom. One in particular weighed for many days afterwards upon his mind.

It was a sultry night. He had come out for a stroll down Upper Street and High Street, before going to bed. Outside the Angel, the limit of his walk, he lingered a moment and was looking with idle interest at the great block of omnibuses, when he became aware that a poorly-dressed woman was standing by him, gazing rigidly into his face. He started, tried to fix her identity.

"Good God! It is you!" said the woman.

Then he remembered. It was Annie Stevens, the girl who had betrayed him so miserably to the theatrical company years before.

"Won't you speak to me?" she asked, somewhat humbly, as he remained silent.

"You recall a very bitter time to me," said Joyce.

"Do you think it is any sweeter to me?" she asked.

And then, with a quick glance round at an approaching policeman: —

"Walk on a little way with me, will you?"

He hesitated for a moment, but a beseeching look in her eyes touched him. Her presence at that place, at that hour, spoke of tragedy. She had never been pretty. Now she had grown thin and hard-featured.

"You need n't fear I 'm going to ask you for anything — you of all people in the world. Of course, if you don't want to be seen with me, don't come. You can't hurt me. I 'm past that. But I 'd like to speak with you for a minute or two."

He had moved on with her while she was talking. Then there were a few moments' silence.

"Well?" he enquired. "What do you wish to say?"

"God knows — anything — just to ask you, perhaps, whether you 're right again. I have thought of you enough."

He glanced at her curiously.

"Why have you come to this?"

"Why did you go to prison?" she retorted.

"I did wrong and was punished for it."

"So did I. This is my punishment. After you had gone, I could have torn my heart out. I went on the drink — could n't get engagements — went downhill. I can't go much lower, can I? If you want revenge, you 've got it."

She tossed her head in her old, defiant way. Joyce, perceiving her association of himself in her downfall, felt somewhat moved with pity.

"God knows, revenge is the last thing I want. On the contrary, I am distressed to see you come to this. If I could help you, I would do so. But that, you know as well as I, is out of my power."

"Yes; the only thing you could do, would be to marry me and make an honest woman of me, and that is n't likely," she said, cynically.

"No, it is n't likely," said Joyce. "I can only be deeply sorry for you."

"I wonder whether you could tell what it is

to me to talk to you even in this way. Oh, God! if you knew how I longed to see you!"

"Why did you act as you did toward me?" he asked.

"I don't know. Don't ask me. Because every woman's got a tiger in her somewhere, I suppose. I used to think men were the brutes. Now I know it's women. We're all the same. I hate myself. I wish you would take me up a back street and kill me. This is a hell of a life. Do you remember the last words you said to me? 'Some people are better dead.' It's the truest thing I've ever heard from man or woman."

"It's easy enough to get out of the world, if we want to," said Joyce. "But perhaps it's better to fight it out. You must make an effort and get out of this life — a proud girl like you."

"I have n't much pride left."

"I thought so too. But it takes a lot of killing. I've come out fairly straight. Why should n't you?"

"I'll come out straight, the only way — a corpse. But I'm glad things are better with you. It relieves me to know it. I thought I had sent you to the devil, and that's why I

went there myself, I suppose. Well, I won't keep you any longer. I know you hate being seen with me."

"Can't I do anything for you?" said Joyce, feeling in his pocket.

"Yes — flay me alive by offering me money. You did once — do you remember?"

She stopped abruptly, took Joyce's proffered hand, and said in a softer voice: —

"It 's good of you to shake hands with me. Men are better than women. Thank God I 've seen you at last. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Joyce, kindly.

They parted, and went their different ways, Annie Stevens to the horror of her life and Joyce to the home that held Yvonne. The parallel and the contrast smote him as he walked along the familiar street. Both himself and this girl that had fallen were derelicts, both were expiating the past, both were carrying within them a degraded self, that with a nobler self waged cruel and eternal warfare. For the injury she had done him he cherished no resentment. He felt a great pity for her, and judged her gently.

It was strange how his rudderless course through the last six years had been influenced

by other lonely and drifting craft. Annie Stevens, who had loved and nearly wrecked him, had been the cause of his linking fortunes with poor Noakes; and it was through Yvonne — with whom, sweetest of derelicts, he was now voyaging on unruffled waters — that he had first drifted towards Annie Stevens. He was pondering over this one day during an idle hour in the shop with the old bookseller, when a whimsical fancy seized him.

"You lead a very lonely life, Mr. Runcle," he said suddenly.

Yes," replied the old man. "I suppose I do. Beyond one sister, who has been dying for many months, I have neither kith nor kin in the world."

CHAPTER XIX

FERMENT

"Is all this true?" asked Yvonne, mournfully.

"Yes, worse luck," replied Joyce, looking up from his Sunday newspaper.

"It is very dreadful," said Yvonne.

She was finishing "The Wasters," Joyce's lately published novel. It was not a success. Its cultivated style received recognition everywhere, but the unrelieved pessimism, powerfully as it was presented, repelled most readers. He was inclined to be depressed at its reception. To Yvonne, however, it was a revelation. She closed the book with a sigh, and remained for some time gazing absently at the cover. Then she rose in her quick way.

"Let us go out — into the sunshine — or I shall cry. I feel miserable, Stephen."

"On account of that wretched book?"

"That and other things. Take me to Regent's Park — to see the flowers."

He assented gladly and Yvonne went to put on her things. Shortly afterwards they were side by side on the garden seat of a westward bound omnibus.

"I feel better," said Yvonne, breathing in the summer air. "Don't you?"

"It is nice," answered Joyce. "I shall be better pleased when we are out of these joyless streets. The Pentonville Road on a Sunday is depressing. I haven't seen a smile on a human face since we have been out. What grey lives people lead."

"But they can't all be unhappy," she said.

The 'bus stopped for a moment. Three or four young roughs, in Sunday clothes, with coarse, animal faces and discordant speech passed by below on the pavement, and noisily greeted a couple of quiet-looking girls, evidently acquaintances.

"These seem cheerful enough," said Yvonne.

Joyce shrugged his shoulders.

"Did it ever occur to you what misery men of that type work in the world? By the laws of their class they will all marry — and marry young. Fancy a woman's life in the hands of any of those fellows."

The 'bus moved on. Yvonne was silent.

His tone was that of the book she had just been reading. She stole a side glance at him. His face in repose was always sad and brooding. To-day she seemed to read more clearly in it the lines that the breaking of the spirit had caused. She identified him with the characters in the sordid scenes he had described. Presently she laid her hand lightly on his arm.

"Do you think we live a very grey life — now?"

"You have a very hard, dull, monotonous life," he replied.

"I don't," said Yvonne stoutly. "I am very pleased and contented. I only want one thing to make me perfectly happy."

"So does every one. The one thing just makes the difference. It's the one thing we can't possibly get."

"It is n't what you imagine," said Yvonne. "You are thinking of money and all that."

"No. It's your voice."

"It is n't!" cried Yvonne, with a touch of petulant earnestness. "It is to see you bright and happy — as you used to be long, long ago. You might have known."

"It is very dear of you," he answered, after a pause. "I am selfish — and can't understand

your sweet spirit. Sometimes I seem to have a stone heart, like the man in the German story."

"You have a warm, generous heart, Stephen. What other man would have done what you have for me?"

"It was pure selfishness on my part," he replied. "The loneliness was too appalling. And then, further, I am never quite sure I have acted rightly by you."

"I am," she said. "And I 'm the best judge, I think."

But Joyce was correct in his bitter self-analysis. Now and then his sensitive fibres vibrated. But generally the weight of the past years was on his heart, and repressed continuous emotion. To live on these intimate terms with Yvonne and never consider the possibility of loving her, after the way of men, was absurd. The chivalrous instincts awakened by her implicit trust in him, and the double barrier which forbade a love that could result in marriage, made him dismiss such considerations. But often, in gloomy introspective moods, his self-contempt denied these instincts as arrogant pretensions, and attributed the absence of warmer feelings towards Yvonne to

the petrifaction of all emotional chords. Of late, however, he had ceased to speculate, taking his insensibility for granted.

When they arrived at the Regent's Park, they proceeded for some distance northwards up the great avenue. It was crowded. Joyce looked about him, with a fidgeted air, at the stream of passers-by.

"Let us get away from the people and sit under a tree," he said at length.

Yvonne slipped her hand impulsively through his arm.

"I wish you knew how proud I am of you," she said.

"It's for your sake, too, Yvonne, dear," he replied in a touched voice.

She made one of her magnificent little gestures with the hand holding her sunshade.

"I have never done anything to be ashamed of yet," she said proudly, and glanced from Joyce to a pompous elderly couple with an air of defiance. Then she brought him abruptly to a stand before a flower-bed bright in its summer glory.

"Oh, how lovely! Look!"

She broke into little joyous exclamations. Colour affected her like music. A glow came

into her cheek. She became again the thing of warmth and sunshine that had gladdened him four years before, when his degradation lay heavy on him.

"It *is* a beautiful world, Stephen."

"You are right, dear. It is. And you are the most beautiful thing in it."

The glow deepened on her face, and a bright moisture appeared in her eyes as she glanced upwards.

"That 's very, very foolish. But you said it as if you meant it."

"I did indeed, Yvonne."

"Let us go and find a place under the trees," she said softly.

They left the main avenue and wandered on over the green turf, seeking for a long time a piece of shade untenanted by sprawling men, or lovers, or heterogeneous families. At last they found a lonely tree and sat down beneath it.

"Are you happier here?" she asked.

"Much. It is so peaceful. When I was in South Africa I yearned for civilisation and men and women. Now I am in London, I am happiest away from them. Men are funny animals, Yvonne."

Yvonne looked down at the ground and

nervously plucked at the grass. Then she raised her eyes quickly.

"When are you going to be quite happy, Stephen?"

"I am happy enough now."

"But when you get home, the black mood may come over you again. Can't you forget all the horrid past — the prison — and all that?"

It was the first time she had ever alluded to it directly; her voice quavered on the word.

"No, I can never forget it," he replied in a low tone. "If I live to be a hundred, I shall remember it on my deathbed."

"You seem to feel it — just like a woman does — who has been on the streets — as if nothing could wipe it away."

He was startled. Signs had not been wanting of a change coming over Yvonne, but he had never heard a saying on her lips of such perceptive earnestness. It was strange, too, that she had hit upon a parallel that had been in his mind since the night he had met Annie Stevens.

"Nothing can wipe it away, Yvonne. It is like a woman's sense of degradation — just as you say."

"I would give anything — my voice over

again, if I had it — to help you. You have never told me about it — the dreadful part of it — I want to know — every bit — tell me now, will you?"

"You would loathe me, as much as I loathe myself, if I told you."

He was lying on one elbow, by her side. She ventured a gossamer touch upon his forehead.

"You don't know much about a woman, although you do write books," she said.

The touch and the tone awoke a great need of expansion. He struggled for a few moments, and at last gave way.

"Yes, I 'll tell you — from the very beginning." And there in the quasi-solitude of their tree — one of innumerable camping-spots for recumbent figures, that met the eye on all sides — he gave, for the first time, definite utterance to the horrors that had haunted him for six years. He told her the old story of the earthenware pot careering down the stream in company with the brazen vessels; of his debts, staring ruin, and his yielding to the great temptation; of his trial, his sentence rendered heavier by the fact that his malversations had brought misery into other lives. He described to her

in lurid detail just what the prison-life was, what it meant, how its manifold degradation ate into a man's flesh, became infused in his blood and ran for ever through his veins. He spared her nothing of which decency permitted the telling. Now and then Yvonne shivered a little and drew in a quick breath; but her great eyes never left his face — save once when he showed her his hands still scarred by the toil from which delicate fingers never recover.

He had spoken jerkily, in hard, dry tones; so he ended abruptly. There was silence. Yvonne's little gloved hand crept to his and pressed it. Then, with a common impulse, they rose to their feet.

"Thank you for telling me," she said, coming near to him and taking his arm. "I did not know how how terrible it has been — and I never realised what a brave man you are."

"I — brave, Yvonne?" he cried with a bitter laugh.

"Yes — to have gone through that and to be the loyal, tender, true-hearted gentleman that you are."

He looked down at her and saw her soft eyes filled with tears and her lips quivering

"You still feel the same to me, Yvonne, now that you know it all?" he asked, bending forward on his stick.

"More," she answered. "Oh, — much more."

They walked back to the Park gates in a happy silence, drawn very near to one another, since both hearts were very full. So close together did they walk, so softened was the man's face, and so sweetly proud the woman's, that they might have been taken for lovers. But if love was hovering over them, he touched neither with an awakening feather. And so they passed on their way untroubled.

That day was, in a certain sense, a landmark in their lives. Yvonne never referred to the prison again, but she learned to know when its shadow was over him and at such times her nature melted in tenderness towards him.

The days wore on. The second novel, over whose pages Yvonne had cast gleams of sunshine, was finished and disposed of to the same publishers. His source of income from occasional journalism showed signs of becoming steadier. But all the same, the struggle with poverty continued hard. Yvonne fell ill again and lost her music-lessons. It took some time

after her recovery to pay off the debts incurred for doctor, medicine, and invalid necessaries. To obtain funds to take her to the seaside for a few days, Joyce was forced to ask his publishers for an advance. However, the trip restored Yvonne to health again, and their uneventful life pursued its usual course.

One day a strange phenomenon occurred. A visitor was announced. It was the sister who had tended Yvonne in the hospital. Once before, while Yvonne was living in the Pimlico lodgings, she had paid a flying visit. On this occasion she stayed for a couple of hours with Yvonne, who, happy as she was with Joyce, felt a wonderful relief in talking again familiarly with one of her own sex. She poured forth the little history of all that had befallen her since she had left the hospital.

"Do you mean to tell me," the sister said at last, "that you keep house together on this romantically Platonic basis?"

Yvonne regarded her, wide-eyed.

"Of course. Why should n't we?"

The sister was a woman of the world. When she had entered the room and perceived the unmistakable signs of a man's general presence, she had drawn her own conclusions

That these were erroneous, Yvonne's innocent candour most clearly proved. Yet she was astonished, perhaps a little disappointed. The offending Eve lingers in many women, even after much self-whipping — for the greater comfort of their lives.

"But how can a man look at you and not fall in love with you?" she asked downright.

Yvonne laughed, and ran to the kettle that was boiling over on the gas-stove — she was making tea for her visitor.

"Oh, you can't think of the number of people who have said those same words to me! Why, that is why I am so happy with Stephen — he has never dreamed of making love to me; never once — really. And, do you know, he's the only man I've ever had much to do with who has n't."

"He looks like a man who has seen a great deal of trouble," said the sister.

Yvonne's laugh faded, and a great seriousness came into her eyes.

"Awful trouble," she said in a very low and earnest voice.

"Perhaps that makes him different from other men," said the sister, taking her hand and smoothing it.

"Perhaps," replied Yvonne.

It was a new light, quick and clear, flashed upon their relations. Her woman's instinct clamoured for confirmation.

"Do you think that if he had not this great trouble, he would necessarily have fallen in love with me, like the others?"

"It stands to reason," replied the elder woman gently — "if he's a man at all. And he is a man — one, too, that many women could love and be proud of."

"Oh, thank you for saying that!" cried Yvonne, impulsively. "I am proud of him."

An imperceptible smile played over the sister's plain, pleasant face. Her calling had brought her a certain knowledge of human nature, and taught her to judge by suppressions. This side-light on the inner lives of the two beings whose fortunes had long ago interested her, quickened her sympathies for them. She determined to keep them in view for the future — and with this intention she offered Yvonne opportunities for continuing the friendship.

"So you'll come and see me often," she said at last. "I haven't very many friends."

"And I haven't any at all," said Yvonne,

smiling. "And oh! you don't know what a comfort it would be to have a woman to go to now and then!"

The visit left Yvonne thoughtful and happy. A new feeling towards Joyce budded in her heart and the process was accompanied by tiny shocks of tender resentment. So conscious was she of this, that that evening whilst Joyce was working in the armchair opposite to her, she suddenly broke into a little musical laugh. He looked up and caught the reflection of her smile.

"What is amusing you, Yvonne?"

She still smiled, but a deep red flush showed beneath her dark skin.

"My thoughts," she said, in a tone that admitted of no further question.

Yet she would have liked to tell him. It was so humorous that she should feel angry because he did not fall in love with her.

Sometimes light moods are delicate indexes to far-away, unknown commotions. Afterwards, in the serious moments, when the bird-like inconsequence fled away from her and she realised herself as a grown woman to whom had come the knowledge of life, this that she had laughed and blushed over ap-

peared sad and painful. It kept her awake sometimes at nights. Once she got out of bed, lit her candle, and looked closely at her face in the glass. But she returned comforted. She was not getting old and unattractive.

Yet a vague ferment in her nature began to puzzle her sorely. Her mind, that was once as simple as a child's and as clear as spring water, seemed now tangled with many complexities; she saw into it, as in a glass, darkly. Life, for the first time appeared to her incomplete. She was weighed down with a sense of failure. The very facts that had caused the happy possibility of her comradeship with Joyce smote her as proofs of the inadequacy of her own womanhood. The essential fierce vanity of sex was touched.

Once only before had she used her sex as a weapon — on that miserable day at Ostend, to keep Everard by her side. Then she had felt the fire of shame. Now she was tempted to use it again, and the shame burned deeper.

And Joyce, familiarised with the daily sweetness of her companionship, did not notice the gradually stealing increase of tenderness in her ways.

CHAPTER XX

UPHEAVAL

It was late in the afternoon. The old man had gone away to Exeter, to bury his sister, his only surviving relative. Joyce was alone in the shop busily sorting a job lot of books that had come in during the morning. They were stacked in great piles at the further end, forming a barrier between himself and the doorway, where the falling light was creeping in upon the neatly-arranged shelves. Above him flared a gas-jet. It was warm and dusty work, and Joyce had taken off his coat and collar and rolled up the sleeves of his flannel shirt. Some of the worthless books he threw on two piles on the floor, to be placed in the twopenny and fourpenny boxes outside. Others he priced and catalogued. Others, again, in good bindings, or otherwise obviously of value, he dusted with a feather brush and put aside for the old man's inspection. Now and again

space failed for the assorted lots, and he would carry great strings of volumes supported under his chin to convenient stacking-spaces on the shelves. Then he would proceed with his sorting, cataloguing, and cleansing.

Presently the back-parlour door opened and Yvonne appeared. Joyce paused, with a grimy volume in his hand, in the midst of a cloud of dust that rose like incense, and his heart gave a little throb of gladness. She looked so fresh and sweet as she stood there, daintily aproned, in the darkness of the doorway, with the light from the gas-jet falling upon her face.

"Tea's ready," she remarked.

"Let me finish this lot," he said, pointing to a pile, "and then I 'll come."

She nodded, advanced a step and took up a great in-folio black-letter.

"What silly rubbish," she said, with a superior little grimace, as she turned over the pages. "Fancy any one wanting to buy this."

"You had better put it down, if you don't want to cover yourself with dirt," said Joyce.

She dropped the book, looked at her soiled hands with a comic air of disgust.

"Horrid things! Why didn't you tell me?"

Joyce laughed for answer. It was so like Yvonne. After she had withdrawn, with a further reminder about the tea, he went on smiling to himself.

It was very sweet, this brother and sister life of theirs, in spite of its isolation. There seemed no reason why it should not continue for ever. Indeed, he scarcely thought of change. Now that his small earnings seemed practically assured and Yvonne could contribute from her singing lessons something to the household expenses, the wolf was kept pretty far from the door.

He was in one of his lighter moods, when Yvonne's sunshine "scattered the ghosts of the past," and illuminated the dark places in his heart. He hummed a song, forgetful of the gaol and his pariahdom, and thought of Yvonne's face awaiting him at the tea-table, as soon as he had completed his task.

A hesitating step was heard in the shop. He thought it was the boy returning from an errand.

"Another time you are sent out round the corner, don't take a quarter of an hour," he cried, without turning round.

An irritated tap of the foot made him realise

that it was a customer. He sprang forward with apologies, and, as it had grown dusk, he seized a taper and quickly lighted the gas in the shop.

Then he looked at the man and started back in amazement; and the man looked at him; and for a few seconds they remained staring at one another. The visitor wore apron and gaiters and a bishop's hat, and his dignified presence was that of Everard Chisely. He surveyed Joyce's grimy and workaday figure with a curl of disgust on his lip. The glance stung Joyce like a taunt. He flushed, drew himself up defiantly.

"You are the last person I expected to meet here," said the Bishop, haughtily.

"Your lordship is the last person I desired to see," retorted Joyce.

"Doubtless," replied the Bishop. "And now we have met, I have only one thing to say to you. I have traced Madame Latour to this house. Where is she?"

"She is here — upstairs."

"In this —" began the Bishop, looking round and seeking for a word expressive of distaste.

"— hovel?" suggested Joyce. "Yes."

"Under your protection?"

"Under my protection."

Then Joyce noticed that his lips twitched, and that the perspiration beaded on his forehead, and that an agony of questioning was in his eyes.

"Have you been villain enough—?" he began in a hoarse, trembling voice.

But Joyce checked him with a sudden flash and an angry gesture.

"Stop! She is as pure as the stars. Let there be no doubt about that. I tell you for her sake, not for yours."

The Bishop drew a long breath and wiped his forehead. Joyce took his silence for incredulity.

"If I were a villain," he continued, "do you think it would matter a brass button to me whether you knew it? I should say 'yes,' and you would walk away and I should never see you again."

He thrust his hands in his pockets and faced his cousin. All the pariah's bitter hatred arose within him against the man who stood there, the representative of the caste that had disowned and reviled him; conscious, too, as he was, of standing for the moment on a higher plane.

"I believe you. Oh — indeed — I believe you," replied Everard, hurriedly. "But why is she here? Why has she sunk as low as this?"

"Your lordship should be the last to ask such a question."

"I don't understand you."

"I should have thought it was obvious," said Joyce, with a shrug of his shoulders.

The sarcasm sounded in the Bishop's ears like cynicism.

"Do you mean that you have inveigled Madame Latour into supporting you?" he asked in a tone of disgust.

Joyce laughed mirthlessly.

"Listen," he said. "Let us come to some understanding. I am a member of the criminal classes, and you are a bishop of the English church. Perhaps the God you believe in may condescend to judge between us. The woman who was once your wife appealed to you when she was sick and penniless, and you disregarded her appeal. I, a poverty-stricken outcast supported her, gave her a home, and reverenced her as a sacred trust. 'Whether of them twain did the will of his father?'"

Everard stared at him in wide-eyed agitation. A customer entered with a book he had selected

from the stall outside. Joyce went forward, received the money and returned to his former position by the Bishop.

"I received no appeal from her," said the latter.

"You did, through me. She was too ill to write."

"When was this?"

"Last November, a year ago."

Everard reflected for a moment and then a sudden memory flashed upon him, and an expression of deep pain came over his face.

"God forgive me! I threw your letter into the fire unopened."

"Might I ask your reason?" asked Joyce, feeling a grim joy in his cousin's humiliation.

"I had been warned that you had gone to Fulminster on a begging errand —".

"Did the Rector have the iniquity to write you that?" burst in Joyce fiercely.

"It was not the Rector."

"Who, then? I saw no one but him. I was simply seeking Madame Latour."

"I name no names," replied the Bishop, stiffly. "I am merely explaining. The letter, in fact, came by the same mail as yours. Little suspecting that you could address me on any

subject unconnected with yourself, and keeping to my resolution to hold no further communication with you, I destroyed, as I say, your letter unopened. Believe me, the apology I tender to you — "

"Is neither here nor there," said Joyce, coldly. "I am past feeling such slights. I suppose your correspondent was that she-devil Emmeline Winstanley. I congratulate you."

The Bishop made no reply, but paced backwards and forwards two or three times with bent head, along the book-lined shelves. Then he stopped and said abruptly : —

"Tell me the facts about Yvonne."

The conciliatory mention of her by her Christian name thawed Joyce for the moment. He rapidly sketched events, while Everard listened, looking at him rigidly from under bent brows.

"I would have given the last drop of my blood rather than she should have suffered so."

"So would I," replied Joyce.

"Would to God I had known of it!"

"It was your own doing."

"You are right. My uncharitableness towards you has brought its punishment."

"I cannot say I am sorry," said Joyce, grimly.

There was a short silence, compelled by the struggling emotions in each man's heart. In Joyce's there was war, a sense of victory, of the sweetness of revenge. He felt, too, that now Yvonne would indubitatively reject the Bishop's offer of help. He had won the right to support her.

Suddenly her voice was heard from the back-parlour door.

"Do come. The tea is getting quite cold."

Both men started. A quick flash came into Everard's eyes and he made a hasty step forward. But Joyce checked him with a gesture.

"I had better prepare her for the surprise of seeing you."

The Bishop nodded assent. Joyce ran to the street door to see that the boy had returned to his post, and, satisfied, left the Bishop and went to join Yvonne in their little sitting-room upstairs.

She had just entered, was lifting a plate of hot toast from the fender. She held it out threateningly with both hands.

"If it 's all dried up it is not my fault," she scolded. "And oh! you know I don't allow you to sit down in your shirt-sleeves!"

He made no reply, but took the plate mechanically from her and placed it on the table.

"What is the matter, Stephen?" she asked suddenly, scanning his face.

"Some one has called to see you, Yvonne."

"Me?"

She looked at him for a puzzled moment. Then something in his face told her. She caught him by his shirt-sleeve.

"It can't be Everard?" she cried, agitated.

"Yes. It is Everard."

She grew deadly pale and her breath came fast.

"How has he managed to find me?"

"I don't know. Possibly he will explain."

Yvonne sat down by the table and put her hand to her heart.

"It is so sudden," she said deprecatingly.

"Perhaps you would rather put off seeing him," suggested Joyce.

"Oh no, no. I will see him now — if you don't mind, Stephen, dear. I am quite strong again. Tell him to come. And don't be unhappy about me."

She smiled up at him, and held out her hand. He took it in his and kissed it.

"My own brave, dear Yvonne," he said impulsively. A flush and a grateful glance rewarded him.

He found the Bishop scanning the book backs.

"Will you let me show you up to the sitting-room?" said Joyce.

The Bishop bowed and followed. At the foot of the stairs he paused.

"I think it right to tell you," he said, "that I have received authentic news of the death of Madame Latour's first husband. The object of my sudden visit to England is to take her back with me as my wife."

The unexpectedness of the announcement smote Joyce like a blast of icy air. The loftiness of the Bishop's assurance dwarfed him to insignificance. As at previous crises of his life, the sudden check cowed the spirit yet under the prison yoke. His defiance vanished. He turned with one foot on the stair and one hand on the baluster and stared stupidly at the Bishop. The latter motioned to him to proceed. He obeyed mechanically, mounted, turned the handle of the sitting-room door in silence, and descended again to the shop.

No sooner was he alone than a swift con-

sciousness of his moral rout made him hot with shame and anger. His heart rose in fierce revolt. Yvonne was free. Free to marry whom she liked. What right over her had this man who had cast her off, spent two whole years at the other end of the world without once troubling to enquire after her welfare? What right had the man to come and rob him of the one blessing that life held for him?

The prospect of life alone, without Yvonne, shimmered before him like a bleak landscape revealed by sheet-lightning. A panic shook him. A second flash revealed him to himself. This utter dependence upon Yvonne, this intense need of her that had gone on strengthening, week by week, and day by day, was love. Use, self-concentration, the mere unconcealed affection of daily life had kept it dormant as it grew. Now it awakened under the sudden terror of losing her. A thrill ran through his body. He loved her. She was free. This other set aside, he could marry her. He paced among the piles of books in strange excitement.

The boy, who had been rapping his heels against his box-seat by the door, strolled in to see what was doing. Joyce abruptly ordered him to put up the shutters and go home.

Meanwhile he made pretence to continue his work of cataloguing. But his brain was in a whirl. His eyes fell upon the marks of Yvonne's hands and arms on the dust of the folio she had been handling. The mute testimony of their intimacy eloquently moved him. She was part and parcel of his life. He would not give her up without fierce fighting.

Then, in the midst of the glow came the fresh memory of his collapse. He sat down by the little deal table, where he was wont to write, and buried his face in his hands, and shivered. His manhood had gone. Nothing could ever restore it. Its semblance was liable to be shattered at any moment by an honest man's self-assertion. It had perished during those awful years; not to be revived, even by the pure passion of love that was throbbing in his veins.

Too restless to sit long, he rose presently and walked about the shop, among the books. The close, dusty air suffocated him. He longed to go out, walk the streets, and shake off the burden that was round his neck. But the feeling that he ought, for Yvonne's sake, to remain until the Bishop's departure kept him an irritable prisoner. The minutes passed

slowly. Outside was the ceaseless hum and hurry of the street: within, the flare of the gas-jets and the sound of his own purposeless tread. And so for two hours he waited, running the gamut of his emotions with maddening iteration. The terror of losing Yvonne brought at times the perspiration to his forehead. With feverish intensity he argued out his claim upon her. She could not throw him over to go and live with that proud, unsympathetic man who must for ever be to her a stranger. Then his jealous wrath burst forth again, and again came the old hated shiver of degradation. How dare he match himself against one who, with all his faults, had yet lived through his life a stainless gentleman?

CHAPTER XXI

A DEMAND IN MARRIAGE

"YES, he is dead," said the Bishop, gravely. "You are a free woman. I have come from the other end of the world to tell you so."

Yvonne, sitting opposite him, looked into the red coals of the fire, and clasped her hands nervously. His presence dazed her. She had not yet recovered from the shock of his sudden embrace. The pressure of his arms was yet about her shoulders. The change wrought in her life by the loss of her voice was almost like a change of identity. It was with an effort that she realised the former closeness of their relations. He seemed unfamiliar, out of place, to have dropped down from another sphere. The oddity of his attire struck a note of the unusual. The dignity of his title invested him with remoteness. His face too, did not correspond with her remembered impression. It was thinner, more deeply lined. His hair had grown scantier and greyer.

She had listened, almost in a dream, to the story of his coming. How, to his bitter regret, he had destroyed Joyce's letter. How, later, growing anxious about her, he had written for news of her welfare. How his letter had been returned to him through the post-office. How, meanwhile, the detective whom he had employed for the purpose in Paris, had sent him proofs of Bazouge's death. How he had been unable to rest until he had found her, and, impatient of the long weary posts, he had left New Zealand; and lastly, how he had obtained her present address from the musical agents, who had informed him of her illness and the loss of her voice.

"You are free, Yvonne, at last," repeated the Bishop.

The tidings scarcely affected her. She had counted Amédée so long as dead, even after his disastrous resurrection, that now she could feel no shock either of pain or relief. It was not until the after-sound of Everard's last words penetrated her consciousness, that she realised their import. She started quickly from her attitude of bewilderment, and looked at him with a dawning alarm in her eyes.

"It can make very little difference to me," she said.

"I thought it might make all the difference in the world to me," said Everard. "Do you think I have ever ceased to love you?"

There was the note of pain in his voice which all her life long had had power to move her simple nature. She trembled a little as she answered: —

"It is all so long ago, now. We have changed."

"You have not changed," he said, with grave tenderness. "You are still the same sweet, flower-like woman that was my wife. And I have not changed. I have longed for you all through these bitter, lonely years. Do you know why I left Fulminster?"

"No," murmured Yvonne.

"Because it grew unbearable — without you. I thought a changed scene and new responsibilities would fill my thoughts. I was mistaken. And added to my want of you was remorse for harshness in that terrible hour."

"I have only thought of your kindness, Everard," said Yvonne, with tears in her eyes. His emotion impressed her deeply with a sense of his suffering.

He rose, came forward and bent over her chair.

"Will you come back with me, Yvonne?"

She would have given worlds to be away; to have, at least, a few hours to consider her answer. He expected it at once. Feminine instinct desperately sought evasion.

"I shall be of no use to you. I can't sing any more. Listen."

She turned sideways in her chair, and drawing back her head far from him, began, with a smile, the "Aria" of the Angel in the Elijah. The grave man drew himself up, shocked to the heart. He had not realised what the loss of her voice meant. Instead of the pure dove-notes that had stirred the passion of his manhood, nothing came from her lips but toneless, wheezing sounds. She stopped, bravely tried to laugh, but the laugh was choked in a sob and she burst into tears.

"Come back with me, my darling," he said, bending down again. "I will love you all the more tenderly."

Yvonne dried her eyes in her impulsive way.

"I am foolish," she said. "Crying can't mend it."

"I will devote the rest of my life to making compensation," said the Bishop. "Come, Yvonne."

"Oh, give me time to answer you, Everard," she cried, driven to bay at last. "It is all so strange and sudden."

He left her side, with a kind of sigh, and resumed his former seat. He was somewhat disappointed. He had not contemplated the chance of her refusal. A glance, however, round the shabby, low-ceilinged room reassured him. The coarse, not immaculate tablecloth, the homely crockery, the half-emptied potted-meat tins on the table, the threadbare hearthrug at his feet — all spoke, if not of poverty, at least of very narrow means. She could not surely hesitate. But she did.

"Take your time — of course," he said, crossing his gaitered legs. There was a short silence. At last she said, with a little quiver of the lip: —

"I promised you, I know. But things have altered so since then. I thought I should always be free. But now I am not, you see."

"What do you mean?" he cried, startled.

"It is Stephen," Yvonne explained. "He saved me from starvation, gave me all he had, to make me well again, and has been slaving all this time to support me. You don't know how nobly he has behaved to me — yes, nobly,

Everard, there is no other word for it. He has rights over me that a brother or father would have — I could not leave him without his consent. It would be cruel and ungrateful. Don't you see that it would be wicked of me, Everard," she added earnestly.

His face clouded over. Pride rose in revolt. He crushed it down, however, and suffered the humiliation.

"It would lift a responsibility from his shoulders," he said. "I myself am willing to take him by the hand again, and help him to rise from his present position."

"You will let bygones be bygones — quite?"

"With all my heart," replied Everard.

"He suffers dreadfully still," said Yvonne.

"I will do my best to heal the wound," replied the Bishop. "I own I have judged him too harshly already."

A flush of pleasure arose in Yvonne's cheeks, and her eyes thanked him. Then she reflected, and said somewhat sadly: —

"Perhaps if you help him in that way, he won't miss me."

"I will guarantee his prosperity," he answered, with dignified conviction. And then, changing his manner, after a pause, and lean-

ing forward and looking at her hungeringly. "Yvonne," he said, "you will come and share my life again — in a new world, where everything is beautiful — ? I have been growing old there, without you. You will make me young again, and the blessing of God will be upon us. I must have you with me, Yvonne. I cannot live in peace without your smile and your happiness around me. My child — "

His voice grew thick with emotion. He stood up and stretched out his arms to her. Yvonne rose timidly and advanced toward him, drawn by his pleading. But just as his hands were about to touch her, she hung back.

"You must ask Stephen for me," she said, in her serious, simple way.

His hands fell to his sides, in a gesture of impatience.

"Impossible. How can I do such a thing? It would be absurd."

"But I can't," she said.

Her tiny figure, the plaintiveness of her upturned face, the wistfulness of her soft eyes, brought back to him a flood of memories. She was still the same sweet, innocent soul. The lines about his lips relaxed into a smile,

and he took her, yielding passively, into his arms and kissed her cheek.

"I will do what you like, dear," he said, in a low voice. "Anything in the world to win you again. I will ask him. It will be making reparation. And then you will marry me?"

"Yes," murmured Yvonne faintly, "I promised you."

"Why did you not write to me again?" he asked, still holding her hands.

"I was going to write when the answer came," she said, looking down. "But no answer did come. And then, I was content to help Stephen."

"You could have helped Stephen, all the same."

"Oh, no!" she cried, with a swift look upwards. "Don't you understand?"

The Bishop saw the delicacy of the point, and motioned an affirmative. But he regarded Stephen with mingled feelings. It was intensely repugnant to him to find his once reprobated cousin a barrier between himself and Yvonne. An uneasy suspicion passed through his mind. Might not Stephen be even a more serious rival?

"You are not marrying me merely on

account of that promise years ago, Yvonne?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Everard," she replied gently. "It is because you want me—and because it's right."

He kissed her good-bye.

"I shall not visit you here again, Yvonne," he said. "When I receive the final answer I shall make suitable arrangements. We shall be married quietly, by special licence. Will that please you?"

"Yes," said Yvonne. "Thank you."

At the door he turned for a parting glance. Then he descended the stairs, with the intention of broaching the matter to Joyce then and there. But although he found lights burning in the shop, Joyce was nowhere to be seen. Nor were there any apparent means of ascertaining his whereabouts. The Bishop bit his lip with annoyance. He did not wish to procrastinate in this affair. Suddenly his eye fell upon an old stationery-rack against the wall, in which were visible the paper and envelopes used for the business. With prompt decision the Bishop took what was necessary, sought and found pen and ink, and wrote at Joyce's table a letter, which he addressed and left in a conspicuous position. Then he found with some

difficulty the street-door of the house and let himself out.

Joyce, whom a longing for air had at last driven outside, was walking up and down the pavement, keeping his eye on the door. As soon as he witnessed Everard's departure, he entered and went through the passage into the shop. The letter attracted his attention. He opened it and read :—

Dear Stephen, — I wished for a word with you. But as the matter is urgent, I write. I should like to express to you my sense of the generous chivalry of your conduct toward Yvonne. I should also like to hold out to you the hand of sincere friendship.

In earnest of this I approach you, as man to man, with reference to one of the most solemn affairs in life. Yvonne, gratefully acknowledging the vast obligations under which she is bound to you, has made her acceptance of my offer of remarriage dependent upon your consent. For this consent, therefore, I earnestly beg you.

For the future, in what way soever my friendship can be of use to you, it will most gladly be directed.

Yours sincerely,

E. Chisely.

Burgon's Hotel, W.

Joyce grew faint as he read. The words swam before his eyes. A great pain shot

through his heart. The letter contained one torturing fact — that of Yvonne's acquiescence. The Bishop's acknowledgment of his uprightness, the courtesy of the formal request, the offer of friendship — all were meaningless phrases. Yvonne was going to leave him — of her own free-will. Although his fears had anticipated the blow, it none the less stunned him. He flung himself down by his table, with a groan, and buried his face in his arms. The realisation of what Yvonne was to him flooded him with a mighty rush. She was his hope of salvation in this world and the next, his guardian angel, his universe. Without her all was chaos, void and horrible.

Presently Yvonne's voice was heard calling him from the top of the stairs: —

"Stephen!"

He raised a haggard face, and with an effort steadied his voice to reply. Then he rose, turned off the gas, from force of habit, and went with heavy tread up the stairs.

"Your tea," said Yvonne, busying herself with a kettle. "I am making you some afresh."

"I will go and wash my hands," he said drearily

He mounted to his bedroom and cleansed himself from the book-dust and returned to Yvonne. He drew his chair to the table. She poured him out his tea, and helped him to butter, according to a habit into which she had fallen. She deplored the spoilt toast. He said that it did not matter. But when he tried to eat, the food stuck in his throat. Yvonne made no pretence at eating, but trifled with her teaspoon, with downcast eyes. Joyce looked at her anxiously. She seemed to have grown older. The childlike expression had changed into a sad, womanly seriousness. Presently she raised her eyes, soft and appealing as ever, and met his.

"Did you see Everard?" she asked.

"No. I was out. But he left a note — that told me everything."

"He asks for your consent?"

"Yes."

"And will you give it?" she asked, below her breath.

"It would be worse than folly for me to try to withhold it," he said, bitterly.

"I will stay with you, and go on living this life, if you wish."

"And yourself?"

"I don't count," she said, "I must do as I am told."

"Would you be happy with Everard?" he asked huskily.

"Yes — of course — I was before," she replied. But her cheek grew paler.

"And you would stay, if I asked you, and share all this struggle and poverty with me?"

"How could I refuse? Don't I owe you my life?"

He looked for a tremulous second into her pure eyes and knew that he was master of her fate. The condition she had imposed upon Everard was no graceful act of acknowledgment. It was a serious placing of her future in his hands. He was silent for a few moments, deep in agitated thought, trembling with a struggle against a fierce temptation. The hand that nervously tugged at his moustache was shaking. Yvonne read the anxious trouble on his face.

"Don't worry over it now," she said, gently. "There is time, you know. Why should people always want to decide things straight off?"

"You are right, Yvonne," said Stephen. "Let us forget it for a little."

"Your poor tea," said Yvonne, with pathetic return to her old manner. "It will never be drunk. And do eat something, to please me."

But it was a miserable meal. The tabooed subject filled the heart and thoughts of each. It was with an effort that they caught the drift of casual commonplaces uttered from time to time. Now and then, during the long spells of silence, Yvonne stole a swift feminine glance at his face. But his sombre expression seemed to tell her nothing of that which she longed to know. At last the farce ended. They rose from the table and went to their usual seats by the fireside. Joyce filled his pipe, and was fumbling in his pockets for a match, when Yvonne came forward with a spill and stood before him holding it until the pipe was alight. He tried to thank her, but the words would not come. The tender act of intimacy made his heart swell too painfully. Yvonne rang the bell and the elderly, slatternly maid-of-all-work, cleared away the tea-things. Sarah was one of the elements of the establishment that made Joyce hate his poverty. She drank, was unclean, was a perpetual soil in the atmosphere that Yvonne breathed. The sight of her was a new factor in the case against himself.

It was a terrible decision that he was called upon to make. On the one hand, wealth and ease and social happiness for Yvonne, despair and misery for himself. On the other, a selfish happiness for himself, and for Yvonne this squalor and ostracism. He knew that her sweet, gentle nature would accept the latter portion unmurmuringly. A voice rang in his ears the certainty that she would marry him, if he pleaded. To repress the temptation to cast all other thoughts but his yearning passion to the winds was indescribable torture.

"I wish I could sing to you," she said, breaking a long silence. "I don't know what to do now, when I feel things. Once I could sing them."

"I should ask you to sing Gounod's 'Serenade,'" said Joyce.

"Oh, not that!" she cried quickly. "It was the last thing I ever sang to you, and it brought us bad luck."

For a moment he put a lover's passionate interpretation upon her words. His heart beat fast. He controlled the wild impulse that seized him, biting through the amber of his pipe with the nervous effort.

And then he realised that he must be alone

to work out this stern problem, on whose solution depended the happiness of three human lives. He rose to his feet.

"I am going out, Yvonne," he said, in a constrained voice. "All this is rather upsetting — and you had better go to bed early. You look tired."

"Yes. I have a splitting headache," said Yvonne.

She tried to smile brightly, as he wished her good-night. But when the door closed upon him, the smile faded, and her face grew drawn, almost haggard. A spirit had descended, touched her with magical wings, and changed at last the child into the woman. Her eyes were set in steadfast envisaging of the future; and they beheld the responsibilities and sadnesses of life, no longer as vague terrors and discomforts from which her light bird-like nature shrank to the nearest refuge, but as dull realities, commonplace in form and grey in hue.

It was her duty to go back to Everard, Stephen not wanting her; for she had promised. It was her duty to ask Stephen for his consent. And it was Stephen's duty to give it, if he did not want her for more than daily

companionship. She had proved that Stephen did not love her. Never had she felt so keenly the failure of her womanhood. It had not cleared his life of haunting cares. If it had, his heart would have been stirred with needs for closer union. The weapon of her sex was powerless. Newer knowledge had come to her. He needed her less than Everard. She argued with desperate logic. And yet there was a lingering, feverish hope — one that made her now and then draw a sharp convulsive breath, as she sat staring, with clear vision, at her life.

CHAPTER XXII

SEEKING SALVATION

He could walk no longer through the drizzling rain, in futile struggle with his soul's needs. As possible to cut out his heart and fling it at Everard's feet as to surrender Yvonne. He called himself a fool.

The glare in front of a cheap music-hall attracted him. He entered, mounted to the nine-penny balcony, where he stood leaning over the wooden partition, wedged among a crowd of loungers. The air was filled with the smoke of cheap tobacco and the fumes of the bar behind. A girl on the stage was singing a song in the chorus of which the thronged house roared lustily. Then came a tenor vocalist with drawing-room ballads. Joyce attended absently, hearing and seeing in a confused dream. A neighbour asking him for a light aroused him from his reverie. He wondered why he had come. To-night of all

nights, when he might be at home in the joy of his heart's desire. Yet he stayed.

A flashing family appeared riding on nondescript cycles. He watched them with half-shut eyes, caressing a quaint conceit that they were his thoughts whirling around in concrete form. The bursts of deafening applause seemed to soothe him. Presently a street-scene cloth was let down and a battered man appeared and sang a song about drink and twins and brokers. He threw such humourous gusto into the performance that Joyce laughed in spite of his preoccupation, and remained in amused anticipation of his second turn. The bell tinkled. The "comedian" came on and was greeted with vociferous applause. With music-hall realism he was dressed in prison-clothes, glengarry, woollen stockings, and black-arrowed suit all complete. He had made up his face into a startling brute. Joyce felt sick. He did not catch the first verse; only the concluding lines of the chorus,

> "I've done my bit of time,
> For 'itting of my missus on the chump, chump, chump."

But then the man began to speak, and Joyce could not help hearing. A horrible fascination held him. The ignoble figure poured

out with grotesque and voluble cynicism the comic history of the prison-life; the plank-bed, the skilly, the oakum, the exercise-yard. He sketched his pals, detailed the sordid tricks for obtaining food, the mean malingering, the debasing habits. And all with a horrible fidelity. The audience shrieked with laughter. But Joyce lost sense of the mime. The man was real, one of the degraded creatures with whom he himself had once been indistinguishably mingled — a loathsome fact from the past. The smell of the prison floated over the footlights and filled his nostrils. All his overwrought nerves quivering with repulsion, he broke through the crowd hemming him in against the partition, and rushed down into the street.

How long and whither he walked he did not know. At last he found himself within familiar latitudes, outside the Angel Tavern. He was wet through from the fine, penetrating rain, tired, cold, and utterly miserable. The revulsion of feeling in the music-hall had thrown him back years in his self-esteem. The soil of the gaol had never seemed so ineffaceable. In the blaze of light by the tavern door he paused, irresolute. Then, remem-

bering the disastrous results of an attempt years before to seek such consolation, he shivered and turned away. It was too dangerous.

About a hundred yards further, a woman passed him, turned, and overtook him.

"I thought it was you," she said. He recognised the voice as that of Annie Stevens. It was not far from the spot where he had first met her, and where, some short time after, he had met her again. For months, however, he had lost sight of her. He recognised her voice, but her appearance was unfamiliar, and her face was half hidden by a Salvation Army bonnet. The apparent cynicism of her attire revolted him.

"Why are you masquerading like this?" he asked, continuing to walk onwards.

"It's not masquerading. It's real. I recognised you, and thought perhaps you'd care to know."

He slackened his pace imperceptibly, and she walked by his side.

"You don't seem to believe it," she resumed. "I don't tell lies. It's the truth that has generally cursed me."

"Then why are you walking up and down here at this time of night?"

"Doing rescue work."

"Have you rescued any one yet?" asked Joyce, with a touch of sarcasm.

"No. I scarce expect to."

"Then why are you trying?"

"Because it's the beastliest thing I could think of doing," she said, stopping abruptly, and facing him, as he turned, in the defiant way he remembered from the theatre days.

"You're an odd girl," he said.

"You don't suppose I wear this disgusting bonnet and get hustled by roughs and blackguarded by women because I like it! I haven't been converted, and I don't shriek out 'Hallelujah,' and I won't, — but I earn an honest living at the Shelter during the day, and at night I come out. It's the beastliest thing I can think of doing," she repeated. "If I knew of anything beastlier I'd do it. I've had flames inside me since I gave you away, — I'd have killed myself for you after, — and hell since I went on the streets, — but I think the other was worse. I've learned what you felt like; now I'm trying to burn out the fire —"

"Stop for a moment," he said, with a queer catch in his throat. "Do you mean you are doing this for your own inner self?"

"Yes," she replied, her direct intuition divining the implied alternative. "I don't know much about Jesus and my immortal soul. That 'll come. I want one day to be able to remember that I loved you — without hating myself and feeling sick with the shame and the horror of it all. You may think me a silly fool if you like, but that 's why I 'm doing it. Let us walk on. We need n't attract attention."

This was wise; for more than one passer-by had turned round, struck by the two intent white faces. Joyce obeyed passively, but continued for some moments to look down upon her in great wonder. An idea, which he became dimly aware had been struggling for birth in the dark of his soul for the past two hours, dawned upon him amid a strange, exulting excitement. Suddenly he took her by the arm and held it very tightly. She looked up at him, astonished.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Do you know what you have done tonight?" he said, in a shaking voice. "You have shown me how to burn out my hell too. You have retrieved any wrong you have done me. If my forgiveness is worth having, you have it, from the depths of my soul."

He was strangely moved. In the impulse of his exaltation, he drew her quickly into the gloom of a doorway — the pavement was momentarily deserted — and kissed her. She uttered a little cry and shrank back.

"Is that for forgiveness?"

"Yes," he cried; and then he broke from her abruptly, and went on along the pavement with great strides.

He was no longer uncertain. The problem of his life was solved. His mind was crystal clear. At last the time had come for the great atonement to his degraded self, the supreme sacrifice that should clear his being of stain.

At last he could perform that act of renunciation that would give the strength back into his eyes to meet calmly the scrutiny of his fellow-man. Renunciation! The word rang in his ears and echoed to his footsteps.

He did not doubt that it would not be to Yvonne's lesser happiness to regain her lost environment of luxury and tender care. On the other hand, he judged her rightly enough to know that she would have found compensating pleasures in a life of privation with himself. Had it not been so, mere manliness would have decided in the Bishop's favour. In per-

fect fairness (he saw now), he could have claimed her. His sacrifice was made in pure loyalty to his conscience.

And it had been reserved, too, for that ignorant, wayward woman, who had groped her unguided way thus grotesquely to the Principle, to have led him thither and revealed its elemental application. He felt a stirring of shame that strengthened his manhood.

The rain had stopped. The clouds broke and drifted across the heavens, and a misty moon appeared at intervals, shedding its pale light upon the unlovely thoroughfare. A fresh breeze sprang up and made Joyce, in his wet things, shiver with cold. At the nearest tavern he stopped, entered, called for some hot spirits, this time from no temptation to drown care, and asked for writing materials. Then, in the midst of the noise of thick voices and clatter of drinking vessels, he wrote at a corner of the bar his letter of renunciation.

DEAR EVERARD, — I accept your letter in the spirit in which it was written. I put the sweetest and purest of God's creatures into your keeping. Cherish her.

Yours sincerely,

STEPHEN JOYCE.

A few minutes afterwards he dropped it into a pillar-box. The faint patter of its fall inside struck like a death-note upon his ear, shocked him with a sense of the irrevocable. Now that the act of renunciation was accomplished, he felt frightened. The immensity of his sacrifice began to loom before him. He became conscious of the dull premonitions of an agony hitherto undreamed of, for all his suffering in the past.

Shiveringly he bent his steps homeward. The gas was burning dimly in the sitting-room. As was usual on the rare occasions when he had spent the evening out, Yvonne had brought down his bedroom candle and had laid his modest supper neatly for him. His slippers were warming by the fire. At the sight, his pain grew greater. Having taken off his wet boots and lit his candle — he could eat no supper — he turned off the gas, and went out of the room. On the landing outside Yvonne's door were the tiny shoes she had placed there for Sarah to clean. He looked at them for a second or two and mounted the stairs hurriedly.

In the shock and excitement of battle a man can bear the amputation of a mangled limb without great suffering. It is afterwards

that the agony sets in, when the nerves have quieted to responsiveness. So it was with Joyce on that sleepless night of his great renunciation, and with his misery was mingled despair lest all should prove to be futile, his theory of renunciation; a ghastly fallacy. Time was when he would have mocked at the proposition. Could he even now defend it upon rational grounds? Had he not cut off his leg to compensate for the loss of an arm, thereby adding to the gaiety of the high gods? He tossed about in the bed in anguish, "burning out his hell."

A man of sensitive, emotional temperament, however, cannot pass through such an ordeal unchanged. Some fibres must be shrivelled up, whilst others are toughened. Joyce rose in the morning with aching head and exhausted nerves, but still with a dull sense of calm. Fallacy or not, at any rate he had chosen the man's part. The consciousness of it was an element of strength. He dressed and went downstairs.

Yvonne was already in the room, neat and dainty as usual, making the toast for breakfast. She was pale and had the faint rings below the eyes that ever tell tales on a woman's face. She

looked round at him anxiously, as she knelt before the fire. He saw her trouble and went and sat in the armchair beside her and spread out his hands to warm them.

"You have been worrying, my poor little Yvonne," he said gently. "I was a selfish beast to let you think I wanted to make up my mind, when my course was so plain. I wrote to Everard last night. I told him to cherish the treasure that he has got. You should n't have worried over it."

Yvonne turned away her face from him, and remained silent for some moments, half kneeling, half sitting, the toasting-fork drooping idly from her hand.

"It was foolish of me," she replied at last. "But it seemed hard to leave you alone — and I 've got so used to this little place — one gets attached to places, like a cat — Did you — were you sorry to give me away?"

"Of course," said Joyce. "I thought we could go on being brother and sister till the end of all things. Well, all things have an end, and this is it."

"You would not prefer me to stay?" asked Yvonne, in her soft voice.

He would have given his soul to have been

able to throw his arms round her, passionately and wildly — she was so near him, so maddeningly desired. Did she realise, he wondered, what flame was in her words? He leaned back in the chair, as if to avert the temptation by increasing the distance between them.

"No," he said, with a sharp breath, "I could not — it will be a wrench breaking up the — partnership. But it is all for the best. I know you will be happy and cared for, and that will be a happiness to me."

Sarah brought in the breakfast and retired. They sat down to table. Somehow or other the meal proceeded. Two things had come by post for Joyce, one a belated but laudatory notice of "The Wasters," the other a cheque from the office of a weekly paper. He passed them both to her, according to custom.

"You must n't bother about me at all, Yvonne. I am in a different way of business altogether from what I was when we first started housekeeping. The new book will do ever so much better than 'The Wasters.' I shall miss you terribly — at first — but it will all dry straight, Yvonne. I dare say I shall go on living here. Runcle and I are immense pals, you know — perhaps I may go into par-

nership with him and bring some modern go-ahead ideas into the concern — become a Quaritch or Sotheran — who knows? Yes, I should n't like to leave these quaint, dear old rooms," he said, looking round, anywhere but in Yvonne's face, with an air of cheerfulness that he felt in his heart must be ghastly. "Something of you and your dear companionship will linger about them. I shall pretend, like the 'Marchioness,' that you are with me."

He passed his tea-cup, and, meeting her eyes, tried to smile. The corners of her lips responded bravely.

"And at last you will come into indisputed possession of your furniture," she said.

He had not the heart to protest. So they continued to talk in this light strain of the coming parting, until Joyce, looking at his watch, found it was time to go down to the shop. At the door, on his way out, he paused to relight his pipe. Then, without trusting himself to look round, he left her. But if he had turned he would have seen her grow suddenly very white, clutch the mantel-piece for support with one hand while the other pressed her bosom hard, and sway for a second or two with shut eyes.

Downstairs he resumed his unfinished task of the evening before. He worked at it doggedly, trying not to think. But it was as futile as trying to hold one's breath beyond a certain period.

"Yvonne is going — to marry Everard — going for ever — I shall be alone — she will lie in his arms — I shall go mad — God help me — if it is more than I can bear, there is a way out — I can keep up till she goes — she shall not know — afterwards." His brain could not work beyond. The same thoughts throbbed with almost rhythmic recurrence as he priced and catalogued the books. Once he opened a tattered "Marcus Aurelius": —

"If pain is an affliction, it must affect either the body or the mind; if the body is hurt, let it say so; as for the soul, it is in her power to preserve her serenity and calm, by supposing the accident no evil."

He laughed to himself mirthlessly, and threw the book on the fourpenny heap. "Or pretending, like the Marchioness," he said. He was scarcely in a mood for "Marcus Aurelius."

A messenger-boy appeared with a letter for Madame Latour. Joyce sent it up to her by the shop-boy, who presently brought down a reply

note. The preparations for her departure had begun. Joyce's heart seemed set in a vice and he nearly cried aloud with the pain.

The hours wore on; the piles of books were disposed of; nothing to do, but wait for customers. To keep himself employed he copied untidy pages of his manuscript. He went up for dinner. Yvonne was more subdued than at breakfast, and they scarcely spoke. When the meal was over, she told him quietly of the letter she had received.

"Everard says that he is getting the special licence to-day, and the marriage will take place to-morrow at St. Luke's, Islington. Considering the circumstances, he thinks it best that there should be no delay."

"It is just as well," he replied. "When changes come, it is best that they should come swiftly. Has he made any more definite arrangements — the hour?"

"He will send me a message later."

"You will have to put up your things. If I can help you, Yvonne —"

"Thanks — no. I have so little. The few odds and ends I shall leave you — as mementoes. You would like to keep them, would n't you?"

"Thank you, Yvonne," he said, turning away. They had spoken in subdued voices, as folks do when discussing funeral arrangements. Joyce, blinded and dazed by his misery, was unperceptive of her joylessness. At the most, he was conscious of a seriousness that, under the circumstances, was not unnatural. His own pain he hid with anxious effort.

The afternoon hours passed. He lit the gas in the shop, and proceeded with whatever mechanical employment he could find. It was a relief to be alone. The old man's gossip would have jarred upon him, driven him up to the sitting-room where the ordeal was fiercest, or out into the hard-featured streets. He would have two or three days of solitude before Runcle returned from Exeter.

Messages came from the Bishop. One for Yvonne. Another for him, acknowledging his letter, announcing that the hour of noon had been fixed upon, shortly before which time a carriage would be sent to convey Yvonne to the church, and begging him in most courteous terms to assist at the ceremony and give Yvonne away. An echo of the Salvation Army girl's voice came back to him, and he

smiled grimly. "It's the beastliest thing I can do."

He scribbled a line of acquiescence and gave it to the waiting messenger-boy. "I had not thought of the dregs," he said to himself.

That evening they sat drearily in their accustomed places by the fireside, each knowing it to be their last together. Night after night they had spent in each other's society, Yvonne sewing or reading or dreaming in a lazy, contented way, Joyce writing upon a board laid across his knees. Sometimes she would come and lean over the back of his chair and watch the words as they came from his pen, her soft wavy black hair very near his fair, close-trimmed head.

"Send me away if I'm worrying you," she used to say.

Whereupon he would laugh happily and answer: —

"See how beautifully I am writing. I should never have thought of that remark if you had not been there."

"I like to play at feeling a guardian angel," she said once.

"You can feel it without the playing," he replied, drawing his head aside and looking

round at her. "When your wings are over me like that, I do work that I could n't do unaided."

And she had blushed and felt very happy.

But now, on this last evening, they sat apart — half the world already between them — and talked constrainedly, with long silences. For the greater part of the time he shaded his face with his hand, sparing himself the sight of her hungered-for sweetness and saving her the sight of the hunger he felt was in his eyes. When at last she rose to bid him good-night, he nerved himself to meet her gaze calmly. And then for the first time he was shocked at the change that the night and the day had wrought in her.

She stood before him, infinitely sweet and simple; but more wan even than she had been on that day in the hospital when she had learned the loss of her voice. For the still unvanished pathos of childhood that had then smoothed her face was gone, and the sterner pathos of the woman's experience had taken its place. Yet the interpretation did not come to him.

"My poor child," he said. "You are scarcely strong enough yet to bear such an upheaval as this. Try to have a good sleep." He held the

door for her to pass out. And then, with a great gulp, he continued, "You must look your best to-morrow."

He caught her soft cold hand, put it to his lips, and shut the door quickly. The prison seemed as comfort when compared with this torment.

CHAPTER XXIII

An End and a Beginning

In the middle of the night he broke down utterly.

If he had been a strong man he would not have yielded to the series of temptations that had culminated in his crime and his disgrace. Or, passing that, his spirit would not have been broken during the months of his punishment. If he had been even of slightly robuster fibre, the sense of degradation would not have palsied his life. He would have gone at once to a new land and made himself master of his destiny. A strong man would not have been found by Yvonne, that August morning, sitting, a self-abhorring outcast before his rich uncle's door. He would not have lost his wit and courage, when assailed by his prison companion at Hull. He would not have joined fortunes with Noakes in their futile African expedition. A strong man would not have clung for comfort and moral support to the

poor ridiculous creature, his own protection of whom was that of the woman rather than that of the man. A strong man would not have yielded to the numbing despair of the after solitude in Africa, nor writhed that night in agony of spirit upon the lonely star-lit veldt. And lastly, a strong man would not have had that terror of loneliness which had made him in the first place cling to Yvonne much as a child, afraid of the dark, clings to the hand of another child weaker than itself.

By the law of evolution the strong survive and the weak die. But in the eternal struggle between humanity and the pitiless law, conditions are modified, and the sympathy of the race, that expression of revolt which we call civilisation, gives surviving power to the weak, so that not only the strong man has claims to life and love. And when the weak man strives with all his quivering fibres towards strength, he is doing a greater deed than the strong wot of.

So Joyce, fool or hero, had performed an act of strength beyond his nature. The strain of the day had been intense. Every nerve in his body was stretched to breaking-point. At last, in the middle of the night, as he was pacing the

room, one of them seemed to snap, and he fell forwards on to the bed and broke into a passion of sobbing. Ashamed he buried his face in the blankets and bit them with his teeth. But a grown man's sobbing is not to be checked, like a child's. It is a terrible thing, which comes from the soul's depths and convulses flesh and spirit to their foundations; and it is horrible to hear. The shuddering heaves came into his throat and forced their way in sound through his lips. And the utterances of pain came from him, inarticulate prayers to God to help him, and half-stifled cries for his love and for Yvonne. But he knew that he was wrestling with his spirit for the last time, and that, after this paroxysm of agony, would come calm and strength to meet his fate.

And Yvonne, clad in dressing gown and bare-footed, with her hair about her shoulders, stood trembling outside his door and heard. Although his room was not immediately above hers, being over the sitting-room, yet in her sleeplessness she had listened for hours and hours to his movements. At last, obeying an incontrollable impulse, she had crept up the stairs. A long time she waited, her hand upon the door, his name upon her lips, shaking from

head to foot with the revelation of the man's agony. Every sound was like a stab in her tender flesh. The warm, impulsive old Yvonne within her would have burst at the first sob into his room, but the newer womanhood held her back. When all was silent she crept downstairs again into her bed, and lay there, throbbing and shivering until the morning.

And Joyce, unconscious that she had been so near to him, that had he but opened his door, he would have been caught in her arms and been given for all eternity that which he was renouncing, lay down in his bed exhausted, and when the morning was near at hand, sank into heavy sleep. He awoke later than usual. The water that Sarah had put for him was nearly cold. He drew up the blind and saw a cheerless grey morning — a fitting dawn for his new life. The minor details of the day before him presented themselves painfully. The first was the necessity of being well shaven, groomed and dressed. He drew from the drawer the clothes of decent life that he could now so seldom afford to wear. The last time he had put them on was three weeks ago, when he had taken Yvonne to a ballad concert at St. James's Hall. He remembered how, in her bright way, she had

said, on their way thither, "You look so handsome and distinguished, I feel quite proud."

And now he was to wear them at her wedding with another man. And he was to give her away.

He had regained his nerve, felt equal to the task. After dressing with scrupulous care, he slowly went down to breakfast, — his last breakfast with Yvonne. He contemplated the fact with the fatalistic calmness with which men condemned to death often face their last meal on earth. Yvonne had not yet appeared. Sarah had not even brought up the breakfast. He sat down and waited, unfolded his halfpenny morning paper and tried to read. After a time he became aware that he was studying the advertisements. So he laid it aside.

Presently he went up to his room to get a handkerchief, and on his return to the landing he noticed that Yvonne's bedroom door was ajar. She was stirring, evidently. He knocked gently and called her name. There was no reply. Perhaps she was still sleeping, he thought; but it was odd that her door should be open. He returned to the sitting-room, wandered about nervously, looked out of the window into the dismal street. The pavement

was wet, people were hurrying by with umbrellas up, the capes of drivers gleamed miserably in the misty air. He turned away and put some coals on a sulky fire, and again took up the paper. But an undefined feeling of uneasiness began to creep over him. It was long past nine o'clock. He went again and knocked at Yvonne's door. It opened a little wider and he saw by the light in the room that the blind had been drawn up. He called her in loud tones. His voice seemed to fall in a void. Agitated, he ventured to take a swift glance into the room. The bed was empty. There was no Yvonne.

He went back and rang the bell violently. After a short interval Sarah appeared, leisurely bringing in the breakfast-tray.

"Where is Madame Latour?" asked Joyce.

"Oh, she went out early, and said you were n't to wait breakfast for her."

"At what time did she go out?"

"Shortly after eight."

"Thank you," said Joyce.

"I think she was took ill, and was going to see a doctor," said Sarah, unloading the tray noisily.

"Did Madame Latour tell you so?"

"No. But she was looking so bad I was frightened to see her."

"Very well," said Joyce, not wishing to show the servant his agitation. "She will be back soon. Yes, you can leave the breakfast."

Sarah quitted the room with her heavy, scuffling step. Joyce remained by the fire tugging at his moustache, his mind filled with nameless anxieties. The presentiment of ill grew in intensity. Why had Yvonne left the house at that early hour? Sarah's suggestion was manifestly absurd. If Yvonne had been poorly, she would have sent for a doctor. Yet the servant's last remark frightened him. He remembered Yvonne's pallor of the night before. A dreadful surmise began to dawn upon him. Had he been blind, all the way through, and condemned her to a fate impossible to bear? Once, in South Africa, he had seen an innocent man sentenced to death. The picture of the man's face in its wistful despair rose before him. It was terribly like Yvonne's. Had she, then, pronounced sentence on herself?

He walked to and fro in feverish helplessness, his heart weighed down by the new load. The cheap American clock on the mantel-piece struck ten. There came, soon

after, a knock at the door. Joyce sprang to open it. But it was only the boy from the shop wanting to know if any one was coming down. Joyce put his hand to his forehead. He had entirely forgotten Mr. Runcle's absence and his own consequent responsibility.

"You can take the money for any book outside, Tommy," he said, after a little reflection. "If a customer wants anything inside, come up and call me."

The boy went away, proud at being left in charge. Joyce filled a cup with the rapidly cooling coffee, and drank it at a draught. The minutes crept on. If his wild and dreadful fancies were groundless, where could Yvonne be? She could not have chosen a time before the shops were open to make any necessary purchases before the ceremony. Or had she gone out of the house so as to avoid spending a painful morning in his company? But that was unlike Yvonne. At last he descended, and stood bareheaded in the raw air, gazing up and down the street.

"I 've taken eightpence already," said the boy, handing him a pile of coppers.

Joyce took them from him absently, and put them in his pocket, while Tommy went

back to his seat on the upturned box, and resumed his occupation of blowing on his chilled fingers. No sign of Yvonne. Several passers-by turned round and looked at Joyce. In his well-fitting clothes, and with his refined, thorough-bred air, he seemed an incongruous figure standing hatless in the doorway of the dingy secondhand book-shop.

Presently he became aware of an elderly man trying to pass him. He stepped aside with apologies, and followed the customer.

"Are you serving here?" asked the latter, with some diffidence.

On Joyce's affirmative, he enquired after two editions of "Berquin," which he had seen in Runcle's catalogue. Joyce took one from the shelves, — the original edition. It was priced two guineas. The customer haggled, then wished to see the other. As this was on the top shelf at the back part of the shop, Joyce had to mount the ladder and hunt for it in the dusky light. While thus employed, he felt something sweep against the foot of the ladder, and, looking down, he saw Yvonne. She shot a quick upward glance, and hurriedly disappeared.

His heart gave a great bound as he saw her,

and he dropped the books he was holding. He could not seek any more for the "Berquin." In another moment he was by the side of the customer.

"We must have sold the other copy. How much will you give for this?"

"Thirty-five shillings."

"You can have it," said Joyce.

Never was book tied up at greater speed. He thrust it into the man's hand, received the money without looking at it, and left the elderly man standing in the middle of the shop, greatly astonished at the haste of the transaction.

Joyce flew up the stairs into the sitting-room.

"Oh, where —" he began.

Then he stopped, dazed and bewildered, for Yvonne, her arms outstretched, her head thrown back, her lips parted, and a great yearning light in her eyes, came swiftly to him from where she stood, uttering a little cry, and in another moment was sobbing in his arms.

"Oh, my love, my dear, dear love!" she cried, "I could not leave you — take me — for always. I love you — I love you — I could n't leave you!"

"Yvonne," he cried hoarsely, his pulses throbbing like a great engine's piston-rod, in the tremendous amazement, as he held her — how tightly he did not know — and gazed down wildly into her face, "Yvonne, what are you saying? What is it? Tell me — for God's sake — the marriage — Everard?"

Then she threw back her head further against his arm, and their eyes met and hung upon each other for a breathless space. And there was that in Yvonne's eyes — "the light that never was on sea or land" — that no man yet had seen or dreamed of seeing there. The straining, passionate love too deep for smiling, glorified her pure face.

"There will be no marriage," she murmured faintly, still holding him with her eyes, "I went to Everard this morning."

She raised her lips almost unconsciously toward him, and then the man's whole existence was drowned in the kiss.

For many moments they scarcely spoke. Passion plays its part in swift burning utterances and tumultuous silences. At last, she freed herself gently and moved towards the fire. But only to be taken once again into his clasp.

"Oh, my darling, my darling, is this joy madness, or is it real?"

"It is real," said Yvonne. "Nothing can ever part us, until we die."

He helped her off with her hat and jacket and led her to the great armchair by the fire and knelt down by her side.

"Oh, Stephen dear," she said in piteous happiness, "it has been such suffering."

"My poor child," he said tenderly.

"I did n't know that you cared about me — in this way — until last night. I tried to make you tell me — Stephen darling, why didn't you? I was bound to go to Everard — I had promised, and he wanted me — and what could I tell him? I could n't say to him, dear, that I would go on for ever living on your dear charity, a burden upon you — yes, in a sense I must be one — rather than keep my promise and marry him, could I, dear? I could only refer him to you — and when you said I must go, it was miserable, for I hungered all the time to stay. And I knew you were sad, it was natural — but I thought you found you did not love me enough to want me as a wife and felt it your duty to give me up. Why did you give me up when you loved me so?"

"I will tell you all, some day, dear, not now," said Joyce. "But one thing — I did not know either that you loved me — like this. When did you begin to love me, Yvonne?"

"I think I must have begun in the years and years ago — but I only knew it last night — knew it as I do now," she added, with a tremor in her voice.

She closed her eyes, gave herself up for a flooded moment to the lingering sense of the first great kiss she had ever given. And before she opened them, the memory had melted into actuality as she felt his lips again meet hers.

"Thank God, I have got you, my own dear love," she murmured. "It has been a hard battle for you — this morning. I went out as soon as I dared — to go to him. I seemed to be going to do an awful thing — to give him that pain for our sakes. He told me I had not treated him wickedly — but I felt as if I had been committing murder, until I saw your face at the door. I told him all — all that I knew about my own feelings and yours. I said that you did not know I loved you — that your noble-heartedness was making the sacrifice — that I would marry him and leave

you and never see you again, and be a devoted wife to him, if he wished it, but that my love was given to you. And he looked all the time at me with an iron-grey face, and scarcely spoke a word. Tell me, Stephen dear, does it pain you to hear?"

"No," said Joyce, softly. "Your heart has been bursting with it. It is best for us to share it, as we shall share all things, joy and pain, to the far end."

"I shall feel lighter for telling you. It was so terrible to see him — oh, Stephen, if I had not loved you, I could n't have borne it — he seemed stricken. Oh, why is there all this pain in the world? And to think that I — Yvonne — should have had to inflict it — either on him, who has been good and kind to me, or on you, whom I love better than I thought I could love anything in the world! And when I had ended, he said, 'He is young, and I am old; he has had all the sufferings and despair of life, and my lot has been cast in pleasant places; he has come out of the furnace with love and charity in his heart, and I have pampered my pride and uncharitableness. Go back to him — and I pray God to bless you both.' He spoke as if each word was a knife driven into

him — and his face — I shall never forget it — it seemed to grow old, and ashen, and hardened."

She covered her face with her hands for a moment, and then, suddenly, the memory of the night flashing through her, she dashed them away with a woman's fierceness and clasped his head.

"But your need was greater, a million times greater than his," she cried in ringing tones, "and your sufferings greater, and your heart nobler, and I should have died if I had not come to you — you are my king, my lord, my God, my everything."

In the formally appointed hotel sitting-room, where Yvonne had twice parted from him, sat Everard Chisely, with grey, withered face. The blow had fallen heavily. He had hungered for her of late years with a poor, human, unidealising passion. The pitifulness of it had galled his pride, and he had striven to put her out of his thoughts. He had lived an austere life, seeking in an unfamiliar asceticism to conquer the inherited, unregenerate cravings for a fuller æstnetic and emotional existence. Yet he had longed intensely for the death of the man who

stood between himself and Yvonne. Twice a year his agent in Paris had reported news of Amédée Bazouge. Such communications he had opened with trembling fingers: the man was still alive; he prayed passionate prayers that the murder in his heart might not be counted to him as a sin. At last, in the New Zealand spring, came the news of Bazouge's death. His blood tingled like the working sap in the trees. He could not wait. He came and found Yvonne.

For thirty-six hours he had become a young man again, treading on air, hurrying on events with a lover's impatience. And now the crash had come. He was an old man. He sat by his untasted breakfast, and covered his face in his hands. His life rose up before him, self-complacent, dignified, immaculate. Yet, somehow, he felt like a Pharisee. He was a Churchman first, a Christian afterwards. His religion had given him very little comfort. It had taken Yvonne from him once, at a time when he might have won her to him forever, and it had brought him no consolation. A man does not often get a glimpse at his own soul; when he does, he finds it rather a pitiable sight. The Bishop saw in its depths poignant regret

that he then had not loved the woman enough to sin for her sake. And there, too, was revealed to him miserably that outraged pride, disillusion, the traditions of social morality, the authority of the Church's ordinances — all externals — had been the leading factors of his life's undoing. A great wish rose amid the bitterness of his heart that he had been, like Stephen, one of the publicans and sinners, upon whom could shine the Light of the World.

Joyce and Yvonne were married one morning quietly at a registrar's, and came back to continue the day's routine. The old bookseller did not appear astonished when Joyce informed him of the unusual change of relationship.

"You have both had your troubles," he said, shrewdly, looking up over his spectacles, and keeping his thumb in the volume of Origen he was reading. "Any one can see that. You would n't be here otherwise. And I 'm not enquiring into them. But I hope they 're ended. And now," he continued, rising with an old man's stiffness, "I 've got some old Madeira that I bought thirty years ago with a job-lot of things out of a gentleman's chambers, and I 'd like to open a bottle in your honour."

Joyce brought Yvonne down to the back-parlour. The wine came out of the dirt-encrusted bottle like sunshine breaking through a cloud, and gladdened their hearts. And that was their marriage feast. Thus began the wedded life of these two. Years of struggle, poverty, and ostracism lay before them. They faced it all fearlessly. To each of them the long-denied love had come, at last, new and vivifying, changing the meaning of existence. Yet the final word of mutual revelation awaited the loosening touch. It came with tragic unexpectedness.

One evening, not long after their marriage, Joyce, looking through the shop copy of "The Islington Gazette," caught the head-line, "Salvation lassie commits suicide in New River." A presentiment of what would follow flashed upon him. It was true. Annie Stevens had killed herself.

"Good God!" he said involuntarily.

Yvonne looked up from her sewing, and grew alarmed at the distress on his face.

"What is it?"

He was silent for a few moments. To tell her would involve long explanations. Yvonne knew of Annie Stevens in connection with

his disgrace on the tour of "The Diamond Door," but he had not spoken of after meetings. Yvonne put her work aside, in her quick way, and came and sat down on the footstool by his feet. As he bent and kissed her, she drew his arm round her neck, holding his hand.

"What has pained you?"

And then he told her the whole of the girl's miserable story, her love for him, her degradation and downfall, and her wild idea of atonement.

"And this is the end," he said, showing her the paragraph.

"Poor girl!" said Yvonne, deeply touched. "It was so pathetically impossible, was n't it?"

"Yes, dear," Joyce answered. "I, too, know that."

"What?"

"The tragic futility of such self-crucifixion. I have never told you the history of that night — why I gave you up — and the part this poor dead girl played in it."

In a low voice, he went over the old ground of degradation and his longing for atonement, and briefly laid before her the facts of his renunciation.

"I know now," he concluded, "that it could only add misery to misery. Nothing that a man or a woman alone can do can restore lost honour and self-reverence. No fasting or penance or sacrifice is of any use."

Yvonne drew her face away from him, so as to see him better. Pain was in her eyes. Her lips quivered.

"Then — Stephen — dear — is it still the same with you about the prison — the old horror and shame?"

"My dearest," he said tenderly, "I said man alone was powerless. It is the touch of your lips that has wiped away all stain for ever."

They looked deep into each other's eyes for a long, speechless moment. And then Yvonne, like a foolish woman, fell a-sobbing on his knees.

"Oh, thank God, my dear, thank God!" she said.